

POWERFUL LANDSCAPES:
SQUATTING, SPACE and RELIGIOSITY in URBAN MALAYSIA

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IN MEMORY OF
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by myself, and is the product of my own work.

Signed:

Date: 17th July, 1997

Abstract

Based on archival, library and ethnographic research, this thesis recasts the notion of "everyday resistance" (as propounded by James Scott) in terms of the landscape and spatiality of an urban Indian squatter settlement in Malaysia.

In postcolonial Malaysia, managing different and often competing ethnic and religious identities in a Furnivallian "plural society" presents administrative problems as well as a resource for political legitimation. Arguably, this is most starkly embodied in "squatter colonies", often perceived as potential sites of urban discontent and unrest whilst at the same time providing significant sources of urban labour and important political vote-banks.

The first part of the thesis examines historically how categories like "squatting", "religion" and "ethnicity" are rendered discursively meaningful. Attention is then shifted to the "ethnographic present" of the fieldwork squatter settlement. I examine varied everyday routines, social practices, and the use of space in juxtaposition to wider cultural and urban processes. Tamil and Telegu Indians comprising two distinct religious groups - Hindu devotees of the goddess Mariyamman and Seventh-Day Adventist Christians - are the main foci of discussion. Descriptions of the celebration of the annual goddess festival (for the former) and the weekly Sabbath services (for the latter) bring out the substantive differences of these two groups in terms of culturally specific spatial idioms, and the theoretical implications they pose for the study of "everyday resistance".

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Table of Contents

Declaration	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	vi
Figures and Illustrations	vii
Abbreviations	viii
Glossary	viii
Introduction: <i>Religiosity, everyday resistance, and space</i>	1
Chapter One	
Framing the Malaysian Landscape	
<i>Colonialism, capitalism and social order</i>	29
Chapter Two	
Urban Utopias	
<i>Squatting and postcolonial urban culture</i>	71
Chapter Three	
Everyday Bricolage	
<i>Squatter spaces and routines</i>	87
Chapter Four	
House, <i>Kampung</i> and <i>Taman</i>	
<i>Accommodating differences</i>	125
Chapter Five	
Local Hindu Spaces	
<i>Parading community, status and power</i>	155
Chapter Six	
Being a Church in a Squatter <i>Kampung</i>	
<i>Embodying Adventism on the margins</i>	185
Conclusions	217
Maps	225
Figures	228
Plates	230
Appendices	238
Bibliography	245

Maps

Map 1 Peninsular Malaysia	225
Map 2 Sketch map of fieldwork site	226
Map 3 Layout Plan of a portion of Kampung Nehru and Kampung Pinang	227

Diagrams

Figure 1 The Mariyamman <i>kovil</i> building	228
Figure 2 The Seventh-Day Adventist Church building	229

Plates

Plate 1 Living in the Sky	230
Plate 2 Modern Living	230
Plate 3 Green Living	231
Plate 4 Fluid Spaces	231
Plate 5 Making Way	232
Plate 6 Adventist Spaces	232
Plate 7 The Future	233
Plate 8 The Present	233
Plate 9 Linear Living	234
Plate 10 Sea of Blue	234
Plate 11 The Procession	235
Plate 12 Gazing	235
Plate 13 Colour and Heat	236
Plate 14 Crossing the Fire Pit	236
Plate 15 The Press Conference	237
Plate 16 Public Transcripts	237

Appendices

Appendix 1 Malaysian Five-Year Plans Housing Targets and Achievements	238
Appendix 2 Broad Objectives and Strategies for National Development	239
Appendix 3 The Way Forward: Vision 2020 and the Nine Challenges	240
Appendix 4 United Nations Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1993	242
Appendix 5 Brief History of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church	243

Abbreviations

DAP	Democratic Action Party
FTZ	Free Trade Zone
MCA	Malayan/Malaysian Chinese Association
MCP	Malayan/Malaysian Communist Party
MHS	Malaysian Hindu Sangam
MIC	Malayan/Malaysian Indian Congress
MNC	Multi-National Corporation
NDP	New Development Policy
NEP	New Economic Policy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PAS	Parti Se Islam Malaysia (Islamic Party of Malaysia)
PMP	Privatisation Masterplan
PRM	Parti Rakyat Malaysia (People's Party of Malaysia)
SDA	Seventh-Day Adventist
UMNO	United Malay National Organisation
VOP	Voice of Prophecy

Glossary

adat	customary belief and practice
amma appa	mother-father
balai raya	community hall
gramadevata	village deity
halal	items that are religiously permissible for consumption
kampung	village or settlement
kangani	overseer for recruiting labour
kedai makan	eating shop
ketua kampung	village head
kirani	clerk
kovil	Hindu temple
padang	playing field
panchayat	Hindu temple council
pasar malam	night market
peneroka	pioneer settler
prasadam	sanctified food or other substances distributed to worshippers at the end of puja
puja	worship
pujari	low ranking temple priest
rakyat	commoner, ordinary citizens
rumah batu	brick house
rumah haram	illegally built house
rumah panjang	barrack-like long house
setinggan	squatter
talaivar	village headman
taman	modern housing estate
thiruvila	temple festiva

Note on currency: Between June 1994 to April 1995, four Malaysian *ringgit* was approximately equivalent to one British pound sterling.

INTRODUCTION:

Religiosity, everyday resistance, and space

Malaysia is a multi-racial country with a population of approximately 19.9 million. This consists of the main racial groups of Malays, Chinese and Indians and a very diverse group of indigenous people in Sabah and Sarawak. Bahasa Melayu is the national language but English is widely spoken. Islam is the official religion but Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and other religions are practised freely... Malaysia's history has been one of continual interaction with foreign powers and influences because of its strategic position between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea which has made it the meeting place for traders and travellers...¹

This thesis examines the quotidian practices of assimilation, adaptation and resistance that are brought to the foreground in an urban "squatter colony" situated on the suburbs of Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia. Whilst two distinct religious and ethnic groups residing in the "colony" form the main subject of ethnographic enquiry, I also include a discussion of wider historical exigencies, and cultural flows and processes. Basically, I follow Eric Wolf's (1982) lead in viewing local communities and localities as not analytically "closed systems" but instead as entangled in and constituted by overlapping relational "force fields" both local and global. Southeast Asia as a geographical region with its long legacy of migration, commercial trading, and the rise and fall of empires was far from being a *tabula rasa* prior to European colonialism. Nevertheless, I focus on the cultural forces set in motion with the advent of British rule in the peninsula. From this milieu one can trace the emergence of the modernist notions of "squatting" as an illegal activity, and of the codification of non-Christian religious beliefs and practices for bureaucratic administration. I follow the thread of this argument into the postcolonial period, and examine how the coping strategies of subalterns are complicated by the routines and spatial practices of modernity and capitalism as mediated in town planning, housing structures, and nationalist discourse.

For this chapter, I explicate some of the key concepts that frame this thesis as a whole. James Scott's notion of "everyday resistance" is given particular attention as for the past decade it has offered many researchers a persuasive analytical tool for studying subalterns. Like the study of large-scale rebellions and revolutions at particular historical moments, scholars have also probed the variegated mechanisms that have maintained asymmetrical power relations and social structures. Religious ideologies and rituals, in

particular, have attracted much attention given their likelihood of being used for valorising cultural practices and consciousness. I discuss also the methodological significance of including notions of spatiality in the study of the interplay of religious ideologies, social relations and human agency. Focusing on spatiality as a theoretical lens also implicitly raises the question of the position of the researcher. Unlike archival and library research, there is a peculiar set of problems that arise in ethnographic fieldwork, and some of these major difficulties and constraints I encountered are highlighted in order to illustrate the situatedness, indeterminacy and processual nature of social knowledge. I conclude by setting out a brief overview of the chapters that follow.

Liberation as a religious trope

Scholars have amply documented the myriad ways in which "religion" is an ubiquitous and enduring structuring principle in human societies. Whilst the precise formulations might differ, it is, nevertheless, generally agreed that religion often provides a comprehensive and powerful symbolic matrix for imagining, configuring, and shaping human existence and socio-political orders. Religious imageries and narratives, and ritual practices typically privilege a transcendental authorship, and embody a sense of urgency, immediacy, and of a continuity with the primordial past. It is this particular mix which offers not only an efficacious mode for legitimating various societal arrangements and conserving ritual status, but also a powerful emotive resource for articulating discontent and for animating subalterns against perceived injustices and enemies.

Put differently, religious ideologies and practices whilst clothed in the genre of essentialism are, nevertheless, open to emergent historical forces and social agencies. Construed thus, religion is not confined to a pristine and unchanging corpus of central doctrines and practices or the classical statements that define a particular belief-system. Even in the relatively more centralised systems of scriptural and monotheistic religions, a cursory reading of the corpus of historical, hagiographic, philosophical, theological, philosophical, liturgical and devotional treatises that encompass the core sacred texts provides a variegated picture of heterodoxy co-existing with orthodoxy.

In contemporary Christianity, the emergence of "Third World" liberation and contextual theologies is a case in point. Briefly, their proponents posit that the new locus and focus of theological reflection should be the "non-subjects of history" - the economically

poor, politically oppressed, and the culturally marginalised in human society - in contradistinction to modernist, liberal, and progressive theologies which depict the bourgeois, eurocentric notion of the individual as the primary subject, and which locate the central crisis of theology as authenticity and meaning. In this paradigm shift, subalterns are identified as God's favoured people, and their "popular religiosity" occupies¹²⁵ a correspondingly privileged epistemological position. As largely the non-beneficiaries of the dominant social, economic and political order, the enforced liminality of these subjects is imputed as engendering a special kind of knowledge and experiences fomented out of the contradictions and glosses of imperialism, colonialism and modern industrial capitalism. This emphasis is buttressed by various interpretations of key scriptural passages, and the promotion of alternative imageries and liturgies.²

It is generally agreed that the genesis of this literature is traceable to the writings of "grassroots" priests and theologians in Roman Catholic-dominated South America (see especially Gutierrez 1974). The dire economic imbalance and authoritarian political structures that characterise this region^{are} suggested as the impetus for this paradigm shift. When once traditional biblical exegesis and theological scholarship was universalist and didactic, these authors argue that they should now be reoriented towards the life experiences of subalterns. This venture is only authentic when accompanied by a concrete commitment and solidarity with subalterns. Moreover, there is a communitarian emphasis, and the "Base Christian Communities" become the prime locus for pedagogical activity. To explicate power structures and hierarchies of their respective societies, the views "from below"^{are} juxtaposed to those "from above".

Over the years, the subject position of Third World theologies has been pluralised and enlarged. They include, amongst others, those with feminist, ecological and inter-religious motifs. In Asia, the characteristic concern with inculcating a liberational *praxis* in the face of endemic poverty and political subjugation is poised in striking juxtaposition to "non-Christian" scriptural religions and indigenous cultures given the statistical dwarfing of Christian adherents in the region. Although, like in Latin America, mainstream churches and missionary organisations in Asia enjoyed various degrees of patronage and privilege during colonial rule, ~~the~~ ecclesiastical base is however much smaller and more tenuous. Some theologians have subsequently argued for the Asian theological project to be broadened to include other religious and cultural resources, and questioned the notion of a spirituality of liberation as being the sole monopoly of the Christian tradition (e.g., see

Abraham 1990, Pieris 1988, Sugirtharajah 1993, van Nieuwenhove *et al* 1991). Moreover, it is asserted that it is legitimate to reformulate various treasured Christian motifs, and appropriate non-Christian religious, and indigenous idioms, symbols and categories. In response to charges of "syncretism" and "Third Worldism", it is contended that the present dominant theological articulations are themselves deeply entangled with culturally specific eurocentric philosophies, sensibilities and aesthetics. Nevertheless, it is claimed that the liberative core message of Christianity can still be differentiated and retrieved from the cultural accretions and historical collusions with imperialist and colonialist powers over the centuries.

Third World theological literature can be arguably characterised as a variant of counter-hegemonic discourse sharing similar tropes and themes with other kinds of postcolonial and resistance literature. For the purpose of constituting new political subjects, these authors are predisposed to strive towards a high moral, ideological and epistemological ground by putting to question taken-for-granted and essentialising cultural categories. At the same time, these authors generally adopt a highly stylised and condensed view of subalterns in advocating for their increased social agency.³ Certain features of subalterns' everyday lives and routines are glossed over, and other aspects highlighted or exaggerated in order to fit into explicating the structuring themes of "oppression" and "marginalisation".

That religious imageries and idioms have been historically prominent in an array of anti-colonial rebellions and resistance movements in Southeast-Asia is evident from the colonial archives (e.g., Andaya and Ishii 1992, Iletto 1992). In his wide-ranging historical survey, Iletto, in particular, reminds us that during the high colonial era, these uprisings have been typically relegated to the category of "dacoity" and "millenarianism" in order to exclude them from the realm of "normal" politics. Drawing analogies with various religiously inspired movements in medieval Europe before the advent of the modern nation-state, these "disturbances" were reduced to "irrational and ultimately subhuman forms in order to suppress them more easily" (Ibid.:198). A later generation of scholarly studies on Third World societies relied on the imagery of the "cargo cult" to depict how the ritual systems of "natives" had tried but ultimately failed to resist against the historical changes engendered by colonialism and capitalist encroachment. These activities were construed as "pre-modern" and "pre-capitalist", and as primitive precursors of modern socio-political movements. Framed in this way, these studies share an unwarranted

assumption of the rationality of capitalism, and of the irrevocable trajectory of modernisation in "underdeveloped" societies (Kaplan and Kelly 1990).⁴

Since the pioneering collection of Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), a number of researchers have also turned towards examining how various "traditions" and other markers of identity are socially constructed in opposition to a presumption of an unchanging essence of cultural and religious sentiments. Following this tack, it is argued that during the high colonial period, "native" religious sentiments were typically cast in primordialist and in orientalist terms because of the exigencies of rule. As mentioned earlier, when administrators realised that anti-colonial uprisings often drew on "millenarian" religious imageries, further impetus was given to study and monitor these developments. In the process, "native" religious beliefs and practices became fixed as categories. Various pieces of legislation were also enacted to allow Christianising forces to flourish but with certain qualifications in order to preempt disruptive "native" objections. In colonies where the formal aspects and processes of the melange of local religions were not substantially altered, colonial interests were still served by reorganising and codifying religious practices from a largely *ad hoc* arrangement to a more rule-governed one (via religious endowment and advisory boards). This sometimes led to novel incongruities between the construction of human authority in relationship to divine sovereignty (e.g., Appadurai 1981). The colonial demarcation of the world into strategically distinct spheres, however, was not always disadvantageous to local elites. Chatterjee argues (1993:6ff), for instance, that Bengali elites in Indian colonial society were able, in the long term, to retain a sovereignty over vital markers of indigenous identity by acceding to a division of social institutions and practices into two domains. The "outer" domain of the "material" in which the West has asserted its superiority was grudgingly conceded whilst the obverse "inner" domain of the "spiritual" was to be impervious to foreign intrusion.

Similarly, in postcolonial Malaysia, this legacy of duality is discernible in nationalist discourse. Marked by a desirability of technological progress and modernity on the one hand, and the need for a tempering of this developmental path with the moral and ethical bases of religious traditions, on the other, these narratives allow for an intersection of individual, communal and state interests. Whilst the "outer" domain is construed in terms of a nationalist project - the material benefits of which are supposed to be redistributed equitably - the "inner" domain of religion engenders no less tensions as a resource for redefining communal identities and status making. Islam in the postcolonial religious

landscape is constitutionally privileged as the "official" religion of the country (as contrasted to a theocratically "Islamic state"). But a "freedom of worship" clause (Article 11) is also embedded into the Constitution to safeguard the rights of other religious traditions.⁵ As in many other former colonies, the state enacted "secularist" legal measures based on the modernist notion of citizenship to protect the separate identities of minorities. Contending strands of Islamic revivalism and radicalism, moreover, have engendered spill-over effects beyond the boundaries of its own faithful. Consequently, non-Muslim religious leaders routinely make reference to the primacy of the relevant clauses in the Constitution as the basis of nationhood and inter-religious conviviality. Through their respective channels of information, their own adherents are alerted to the alleged whittling away of these constitutional ballasts.

As alluded to, what has been rendered theoretically problematic are definitions of the proper domain of religious behaviour. Certain brands of secularisation theories erroneously correlated a decline of the public influence of religious institutions with a diminution of religiosity, and of a residual appeal which was confined to "the poor". Moreover, it is now axiomatic to object to definitions of religious belief and ritual which divide human experiences into categorical dualisms. To view religiosity as lacking or, obversely, sedimented in particular social strata is a legacy of academic "two-tier" definitions drawing from particularistic textual and theological presuppositions of monotheistic religions. In demarcating dichotomies between "official" or "institutional" religion on the one hand, and "popular" or "folk" religion on the other, the examination of the various continuities and dynamics of social change within each tradition is obscured (Davis 1982, Tapp 1993). Conversely, "religion" and religious discourses themselves create and legitimate certain power relationships by extolling various culturally specific aspects and strands of "tradition" above others. Asad (1994a), in particular, has contended that it is extremely difficult to escape eurocentric analytical categories - such as "the private", "the public", "the religious", "the secular" and even of "history" itself - when writing about non-Western societies given the ambivalence of the historical colonial encounter and the cultural translation process in Western social sciences. With respect to the academic study of "religion", to construe it merely as a set of symbolic meanings rather than as disciplines of power and reason that shape and order everyday life runs the risks of essentialising a dynamic process. Like "culture", "religion" is increasingly used in public debates to define an arena for contesting discourses on "identity", and an extremely fertile field for political entrepreneurship. A more fruitful way out of this dilemma, it has been suggested, would be

to examine how "religious cultures" and "everyday religiosity" are generated by various social actors and societal disciplines (e.g, Stirrat 1992).

Both the categories of "resistance" and "ritual" are conjoined in Jean Comaroff's engaging study of the Tshidi people in South Africa. Under the starkly oppressive circumstances of apartheid, she argued that their responses would appear diffuse and erratic if the conventional explicit domains of "political action" and "consciousness" were utilised. Instead, it is in the realm of ritual that an appropriate medium through which the values and structures of a contradictory world may be addressed and manipulated as "when expressions of dissent are prevented from attaining the level of open discourse, a subtle but systematic breach of authoritative cultural codes might make a statement of protest, which, by virtue of being rooted in a shared cultural predicament and experience of dispossession, conveys an unambiguous message" (Comaroff 1985:196). Her ethnography portrayed the appropriation and repositioning of the signs of Protestant orthodoxy and the global industrial culture. As expressions of "subversive bricolage", they are attempts "to heal dislocations at the level of experience, dislocations which derive from the failure of the prevailing sign system to provide a model for their subjectivity, for their meaningful and material being" (Ibid.:253). This kind of resistance, however, is implicit and remains largely unselfconscious as the subordinates operate with signs that lie "halfway between precepts and concepts" (Ibid.:261). Nevertheless, rituals are a form of historical practices that are rooted both in local symbols and the transformation of consciousness.

The theme of a deflection of inchoate resistance into religious forms also characterised Aihwa Ong's (1987) study of young rural Malay women employed in a MNC (Multi-National Corporation) factory in Malaysia. She reached a conclusion similar to Michael Taussig's (1980) study of tin miners in Bolivia where the workers were reported as identifying disaffection with the capitalist system in the religious idiom of the "devil". A political critique is offered in cultural terms deployed from the precolonial past. Likewise, in Ong's ethnographic case, she argued that although "the peasant adherence to a noncapitalist worldview has been used to advantage by capitalist enterprises both to enhance, control and disguise commodity relations", nevertheless, it is from this same universe that a moral critique of the dehumanising aspects of market relations is constructed (1987:202). Moreover, this enforced liminality is complicated by the possibilities of inter-ethnic liaisons created by the interweaving of Malay and non-Malay worlds in the factories. Perceived as a dangerous blurring of traditional boundaries, Ong further

suggested that the control over female sexuality is synonymous with buttressing male authority and Malay cultural survival. For women caught in a traditional moral and Islamic order that underlines female deference to male authority and the constitution of a new subjectivity engendered by wage labour, the eruptions of spirit possession episodes in these factories are read as oblique retaliations against coercion. The symbolism of spirit possession stands in as a vocabulary that is beyond the "ordinary" and is turned against the "symbolic violence" of the twin strictures of male surveillance and capitalist discipline.

In the works cited, the question of the subjective agency of subalterns is side-stepped in terms of a re-encoding of the dominant sign system in order to allow the envisioning of new possibilities. Nevertheless, valid questions continue to be raised about the theoretical status of "resistance" if the subalterns themselves are portrayed as not quite conscious of their actions.

Everyday resistance and secularisation

Three key publications are particularly pertinent to the Malaysian situation and to the themes explored in this thesis. They are James Scott's *Weapons of the weak: Everyday forms of resistance* (1985), in addition, his *Domination and the arts of resistance* (1990) as well as Susan Ackerman's and Raymond Lee's *Heaven in transition* (1990). Combining rich ethnography and sociological observations, they make important social commentaries on the differential processes of "development" and "modernisation" in Malaysia. Taken together, these publications cover a wide terrain and complement one another admirably. Whilst Scott's locus of study was a rural Malay-Muslim community (with the pseudonym of Sedaka), a number of urban and non-Muslim religious groups formed Ackerman's and Lee's research subjects.

James Scott's landmark publication popularised the "everydayness of repression" and "everyday resistance" in the literature on power relationships. Scott's rich ethnographic material was used to problematise and theorise the kinds of struggle that stopped short of public and collective defiance.⁶ His sparring partners were theorists who, in his opinion, underplayed human agency by adhering to overly strong versions of the Gramscian notion of "hegemony". He argued that structuralist theories which represented the dominant ideology as impenetrable and reified, and social agents as passive and unknowing were misguided. Gramsci himself was faulted as mistakenly finding the radicalism of

subordinate classes "more in their acts than in their beliefs." Rather, "it is more nearly the reverse, the realm of behaviour - particularly in power-laden situations - is precisely where dominated classes are most constrained" (Scott 1985:322). Conversely, by imputing resistance as "real" only when it is "principled, selfless and collective" is to "ignore the self-interested element in peasant resistance [and] to ignore the determinate context not only of peasant politics, but of most lower-class politics" (Ibid.:295). When the "everyday" context is constituted as a field of study, the domain of resistance is considerably widened. Everyday forms of resistance can be gleaned from "the constant, grinding conflict over work, food, autonomy, [and] ritual" (Ibid.:xvi), and they include a whole plethora of activities like footdragging, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, passive noncompliance, arson, small-scale sabotage, gossip and so forth.

Scott contended further that a striking feature of the ideological resistance of the poor is the manner in which they clothe it with the public language of conformity. This is substantially elaborated in a subsequent publication - *Domination and the arts of resistance* - on a wider temporal and geographical scale. Here, the discursive manner in which the dominant elites and the subordinates embody their relationships is given more theoretical attention. To pave the way towards his central thesis, Scott surveyed various approaches taken by theorists and distinguished between "thick" and "thin" versions of "false consciousness". In the former, the dominant ideology works by the mystification of reality whilst in the latter, the subordinates comply because they are led to believe that the social order is natural. Both versions are ultimately rejected by Scott as they make grandiose claims for the ideological grip of elites and mistake the apparent compliance of subordinates as acquiescence. Instead, characterising this polyvalent relationship in the metaphor of a stage performance, Scott posited that the "more the disparity in power between the dominant and subordinate and the more arbitrarily it is exercised, the more the public transcript of subordinates will take on a stereotyped, ritualistic cast" (1990:3). Under the constraint of the gaze of the dominant, the subordinates wear masks and play out the "public transcript" of deference, respectability, reverence and compliance. However, offstage and in the safety of unpatrolled social spaces, the "hidden transcripts" take over. Here, the tenor and the content changes radically and "the unspoken riposte, stifled anger and bitten tongues created by domination find a full-throated vehement expression (Ibid.:120). Moreover, the "hidden transcripts" are not just behind-the-scenes grumbling but are also enacted in a host of down-to-earth, low profile strategies designed to minimise appropriation.

In between the two poles, Scott coined the phrases "subordinate politics" and "infrapolitics" to denote a middle ground of low-profile resistance where subordinate groups dare to speak in their own name but in a manner in which disguise and anonymity dominate their discourse. For instance, piecemeal squatting is characterised as the infrapolitical equivalent of an open land invasion aimed at resisting the appropriation of land. Indeed, Scott argued that "a partly sanitised, ambiguous, and coded version of the hidden transcript is always present in the public discourse of subordinate groups" (Ibid.:19). Moreover, the dominant groups have also their respective "public transcripts" and "hidden transcripts". In the case of the former, they are dramaturgies to manifest and reinforce a hierarchical order. Idealised and cosmeticised presentations of themselves are displayed conspicuously through stylised gestures, ritualised actions, architecture, and public ceremonies like parades, coronations and so forth. In Scott's scheme, social spaces and sites for the nurturing of a dissident culture are particularly critical for an explicit articulation of protest and the groundwork for substantial social change. Following Bakhtin, he viewed the marketplace and carnival as the sites par excellence for antihegemonic discourse. Here the normal rules of deference and submission do not apply, and people are placed on an equal footing because of the safety of anonymity.

In *Heaven in Transition* the realm of religion as a category for sociological analysis in Malaysia is specifically taken up by examining three urban new religious movements in Christianity (the Catholic charismatic group), Hinduism (Satya Sai Baba) and Chinese religion (Baitiangong). Using the analytical framework of "secularisation"⁷ - understood in terms of the decline of religion as a political ideology, and the fostering of ideological pluralism and instrumentalist rationality - they argued that in the context of Malaysia this notion has to be qualified because of two distinct arenas created since the colonial period. Granted that secularisation impinges on Muslims and non-Muslims alike, this process proceeds at an uneven rate in these two arenas. Whilst Malay-Muslims are subjected constitutionally to a whole gamut of Islamic teachings and legislated policing bodies to mark off crucial boundaries, non-Muslims find themselves in a comparatively *laissez-faire* situation and individually freer to seek out the most efficacious spiritual manifestations in the religious market place.

For non-Muslims, it is further suggested that there are two parallel trends. A more voluntarist, privatised and pluralised kind of religiosity is evolving with the repackaging and marketing of religious forms with the aid of modern technological innovations. For

instance, the emblems of the charismatic movement are strikingly "Western" and "modernist" and involve a "process of shedding traditional constraints on social behaviour and assimilating Western forms of interaction characterised by emotional expressiveness" (1990:85). The main consumers of these religious forms are middle-class urban Chinese, Indians and Eurasians. But this trend is also informed by the pervasiveness of a state-sponsored Islamic orthodoxy over the last two decades which is meant to bolster Malay ethnic rights and privileges. This, in turn, has prompted efforts amongst non-Muslim religious leaders to alert their adherents to what has been perceived as a gradual whittling away of constitutional rights guaranteeing freedom of religious worship. For instance, town planning projections indicate a disproportionate allocation of land for the building of places of worship and burial grounds for non-Muslims. Moreover, recent legislation regarding restrictions on the use of certain Malay and Arabic words in religious literature (most significantly, words like *Allah* which is argued to be exclusively Islamic), and the bureaucratic difficulty of getting official visas and permits for overseas religious personnel into the country are cited as evidence of unwarranted forms of discrimination and alienation (cf. Lee 1988, Nagata 1986, Shamsul 1994). For all these reasons, the participation and roles of the urban laity (particularly the middle class) take on more significant dimensions. Their "secular" knowledge, organisational skills, and professionalism are conscripted to aid the continued appeal and growth of these institutions. Following the logic of the market, there is a concerted effort to repackage these beliefs and practices as well as mark out sacred enclaves in juxtaposition to a world perceived as increasingly disenchanted, unfamiliar and hostile.

The above mentioned studies are persuasively argued and suggest valuable insights into the workings of ideology, human agency, and social change in Malaysian society. Scott's work, in particular, has spawned a number of similar studies of peasants in Asia and Latin America as well as various critiques of his central thesis. For instance, it has been contended that by framing "hegemony" in terms of "false consciousness" and of a negative ideology, Scott has presented a truncated and realist reading of Gramsci's own more nuanced usages (e.g., see Gledhill 1994, Woost 1993). Hart (1991), who studied a similar locale in Malaysia, has also criticised Scott's framework as being "androcentric" and not able to explicate the manner in which class consciousness is differentiated along gender-specific lines as well as engendering different meanings for men and women. Gal (1995) focuses on Scott's linguistic formulation of the "public" and "hidden" transcripts, and argues that he undervalues the force of linguistic ideologies and cultural contexts in which they

are embedded. Moreover, there is little room for the ideological mediation of emotion and for the contradictions of mixed beliefs. Others (e.g., Acciaioli and Nourse 1994, Gutmann 1993, Vincent 1990:403ff) have suggested that blanket *a priori* definitions of "everyday resistance" impute too much conscious agency on the part of the subordinates, overlook more explicit forms of resistance in the Southeast Asian region (e.g., armed struggles), and gloss over the specific social and economic relations which condition the character of resistance.

Amongst other purposes of the thesis, I wish to examine the notions of spatiality implicit in the publications summarily reviewed. I suggest that the framing of a stark, binary and transactional world between the "public" and the "hidden"/"private" realms (in Scott's case), and in two dichotomous and opposing ethnic domains (in Ackerman's and Lee's case) poses certain theoretical problems. Even as conceptual heuristic devices, the realms portrayed appear to be homogeneously, psychologically, and structurally discrete with clear boundaries or zones between them. This depiction bears a remarkable similarity to powerful ideological constructs of the world where categories are made self-evident and self-fulfilling. Scott's notion of "hidden transcripts", in particular, has the additional problem of positing the existence of an ideal-speech realm where words uttered are not tainted by the vagaries of power, and where subordinates are in concord with one another. In a similar vein, Lee ventured to say that whilst the widening gulf between the two religious fields in Malaysia could exacerbate the potentiality for ethnic conflict, at the same time the growth of religious innovations in the "private realm" provides a "possible point of rapprochement between Muslims and non-Muslims" (Lee 1993:55). For both these arguments to be persuasive, the oppositions between the two realms are vital. I suggest that the central lesson learnt from the nature-culture debates conducted in gender studies more than a decade ago has relevance here. Briefly, the deploying of the public-private/nature-culture dichotomies inheres a naturalised oppositional logic that is associated more with certain kinds of epistemologies. As analytical categories, they might obscure more than they reveal (cf. Abu-Lughod 1990, Carsten 1987). For instance, Scott's ideal-type "subordinate" occupying these two realms is portrayed as an exceptionally rational and astute human agent, able to make consistently clear decisions, utter the appropriate words, and navigate skilfully through the domains. Put differently, Scott relies on a theoretical gulf between the body and mind-spirit. Whilst the body might be pliable to domination and hegemony, the mind-spirit is an impenetrable, natural and pristine place harbouring counter-hegemonic impulses.

To be sure, the nature of the problem implicitly posed by Scott is a variation of a recurrent theme in the social sciences that endeavours to comprehend as well as predict the nature of changes in the social world. The categories of "agency" and "structure" are crucial elements in these formulations. Generally, social theories have tended towards one of two possible poles, that is subjectivist and objectivist portrayals of the human condition. Whilst the former places importance on the primary experiences and perceptions of people, the latter analytically brackets them off in order to look at enduring structural processes that reproduce human society. Various theoretical frameworks have also been offered to bridge this gap so as to minimise the intellectually unsatisfactory excesses of both approaches (e.g., Bourdieu 1990, Giddens 1984). If subjectivism promotes a naive individualist and voluntarist view of human agency, objectivism portrays a determinist and unidimensional aura as the plasticity and creativity of the human imagination is tightly tethered to ideological and structural constraints.⁸

Another pertinent facet that impinges on the research endeavour is the realm of epistemology. Salmond (1982) has argued that the language of several academic disciplines is steeped in the imagery of visualism, of knowledge projected as a theoretical landscape open to the transcendent gaze of the researcher. Seeing and knowing is often conflated, and thus the absence of knowledge is metaphorically described as an absence of insight, and conversely, the desire for full knowledge is indicated by transparency, visibility and perception. The experience of research - especially so in ethnographic fieldwork - thus simulates an intellectual journey involving activities of looking, gathering and categorising data. From varied points in epistemological space, the researcher then attempts to make explicit linkages and comparisons between apparently unrelated social phenomena and belief-systems. In this schema, knowledge derived from the "ground" is presumed to be neutral and inexhaustible, and can be worked, reworked, and traversed in an infinite number of ways. But academic discourses are also not conducted in a political and social vacuum. Often they are drawn wittingly or unwittingly into engendering enduring consequences. Edward Said, for instance, has highlighted most cogently that "objective" and "academic" studies of the "Orient" in the past were a "positional strategy which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand" (1978:7ff). In other words, by marking an ineradicable difference between the West and the Orient, Western superiority and Oriental inferiority is also sustained. Whilst his earlier work was based on a specific historical era, Said is also critical of contemporary studies that embody orientalist-type tropes where an essentialising

dualism is deployed to depict "the whole of world history as viewable by a kind of Western super-subject, whose historicising and disciplinary rigour either takes away or, in the postcolonial period, restores history to people and cultures 'without history'" (Said 1993:40, cf. Wolf 1982).⁹

Subaltern historiography

Human agency and the alterity of history also constitute the central concern of the Subaltern Studies collective. Although South Asian colonial and postcolonial histories are the collective's research focus, their methodological posture has implications for historical discourse and archival research in general. These scholars fix their critical gaze on foundational myths ("history as a linear narrative") in historiography and their ambivalent functioning. Since the publication of the first volume in 1982, a recurring theme in their excavation of colonial archival records has been to rescue the "subaltern" from both the projects of national elites and positivist historiography. In the programmatic statement enunciated in its first volume, it was claimed that subaltern politics had an

autonomous domain [which] neither originated in elite politics nor did its existence depend upon the latter....Far from being destroyed or rendered virtually ineffective, as was elite politics of the traditional type by the intrusion of colonialism, it continued to operate vigorously in spite of the latter, adjusting itself to the conditions prevailing under the Raj and in many respects developing entirely new strains in form and content (Guha 1982:4).

It is argued that subaltern resistance cannot be understood as wholly subsumed within the dominant code. In contesting their colonisers, the subalterns were also invariably caught up in renegotiating precolonial cosmology and prestige systems. They traversed both colonial and indigenous hierarchies in appropriating elite artefacts and signs. The resultant syncretic and hybrid expressions bear the marks of their competence. For the subaltern scholars, the notion that the colonial subject emerges from the indigenous elites is challenged by pluralising and plotting the moments of change as confrontations rather than transitions within the great mode-of-production narratives. These changes are signalled and marked in terms of a functional shift in sign-systems (see especially Spivak 1985).

Compared to the task of solely documenting the coloniser's record of domination, these scholars suggest moving beyond merely the retrieval of historiographically ignored voices - women, workers, peasants, and minorities (the subalterns) - to an equal attention to

tracking down and identifying its failures, silences, and impasses. Through this tactical manoeuvre, they hope not to fall into the trap of nationalist or anti-colonial histories which in substance still participate in what has been termed the "counter-insurgent code". In the contexts of peasant uprisings during the colonial period, Ranajit Guha has argued that historians were inclined to liken them to spontaneous natural eruptions or, alternatively, as knee-jerk responses to economic and political oppression. In either case, the peasant is denied agency as the rebellion is located extraneously to his/her subjectivity. This methodological flaw derives from the manner in which immediate accounts of insurgency by colonial officials on-the-spot are incorporated and disseminated over time and distance in official reports and memoirs, and even later on in nationalist histories. From the "raw" data of the "primary discourse" to the narratives of the "secondary" and "tertiary" discourse, the thread that runs through them is "the code of pacification" which attributed the causes of these revolts to oppressive native leaders or, in the case of elitist postcolonial histories, to nationalist struggles against colonial rulers.¹⁰

However, as conceded by Prakash (1994), the actual task of mapping these historical shifts have sometimes proved frustrating for at least two interlocking reasons. Firstly, subalternity implies a fluid and elusive concept, and by its very logic signifies the transience of autonomy. The subaltern is always tactically just beyond our grasp and comprehension for fear of appropriation, co-option and control. Historically tracing the intricacies of this domain in a Third World context is, secondly, made far more difficult and tenuous with the comparative absence of documentary traces of the subaltern's voice in the forms of diaries and other personal written records. A conventional social "history from below" (for example, as typified in the works of the British historian Edward Thompson) thus is not easily written. In part, this dilemma is resolved by the preference of some subaltern scholars to engage with the dominant documentary records of the "elite" with the intention of interrogating their internal fissures, fault lines and cracks with a Derridean-inspired reading strategy (Derrida 1990). For this enormously difficult task, the historically informed inquirer is required to possess not only conventional historiographical and analytical skills but also a whole arsenal of linguistic, literary and discursive abilities.

The exigencies of fieldwork

To my mind, a squatter settlement seemed to be the most appropriate site to ground the perspectives and concerns elucidated in the previous section. However, the

exigencies and character of fieldwork and the writing up process also effected shifts in both the final content and scope of my original quest as the following paragraphs will explain.

In recent years, it has been rendered more theoretically explicit that all researchers are positioned subjects bringing to the subject matter their own set of personal and political circumstances, and lived experiences (e.g., Bell *et al* 1993, Mohanty 1984, Nencel and Pels 1991, Okely and Callaway 1992). Particularly in the area of fieldwork, this positionality bring to the foreground the ethnographer's gender, social class, ethnic identity, ideological persuasions, the nature and duration of fieldwork and so forth. Thus, in opposition to an objectivist approach, fieldwork is construed as an intersubjective encounter where both the ethnographer and the researched are caught up in webs of signification that they themselves have spun. Unlike archival research in which texts can be interrogated at leisure - although the inquirer is also confined to being a spectator of history - the circumstances of fieldwork seldom allow this luxury. Living people are not petrified or inert objects of study awaiting questions. They are instead actively involved in contesting and negotiating the researcher's presence, and ethnographic talk is always situated politically as well as temporally and situationally. Moreover, as a "native ethnographer" in terms of a common nationality but of a culturally different ethnic background, I occupied an ambivalent "insider-outsider" position. Because I am a Malaysian of Chinese origin, certain kinds of information and "facts" were considered as common knowledge or politically "sensitive" and to seek further elaboration of them would be "out of place". Various conversational topics were thus discussed with a great deal of circumspection or, obversely, in an abbreviated and opinionated manner.

Related to the above theoretical shift has been an advocacy of reflexivity as an exercise in elucidating the politics of fieldwork and ethnography. It is argued that this kind of trope is a necessary corrective to the textual objectification and domination of the people researched, particularly those who are "powerless" and "marginalised" in society (cf. Ortner 1995). But however necessary and important this posture is, self-reflexivity can hardly be placed on the same level as other processes that engender redressing various aspects of social reality. Good ethnography by itself does not inherently redistribute income, secure political rights for the powerless, create housing for the homeless, or improve public health of the researched. Nonetheless, given the nature of my research and fieldwork experiences, I have chosen to make explicit some of these ethnographic dilemmas in order to support the central arguments of my thesis.

For instance, situating and gaining entry into a suitable settlement proved to be a more difficult and ambivalent experience than I anticipated. Eventually, after about a month of scouting around without any success, and various earlier leads turning to nought, I decided to focus on the predominantly Indian settlement of Kampung Nehru¹¹ situated in the suburban township of Petaling Jaya about 15 kilometres from the capital city of Kuala Lumpur. The settlement is in proximity to numerous factories and to a Free Trade Zone (FTZ). Petaling Jaya was originally a "new village", an euphemism for one of several hundred military-guarded resettlement villages created during "The Emergency" (1948-60).

Subsequently, various unforeseen circumstances further constrained me to make modifications and compromises to my research. Because the settlement had a long history of acrimonious factional struggles which had culminated in a fatality some years earlier, I could not find a widely accepted "gate-keeper". Conventionally, the village headman (*ketua kampung*) would have facilitated my access but I was to learn over an extended period of time that the *ketua kampung* of Kampung Nehru was himself regarded with some ambivalence. Thus, despite his many reassuring promises of assistance, I was largely left to my own resources to acquaint myself with the settlement. Throughout my fieldwork, I was treated with a mixture of bemusement and guardedness by most residents. Answers to my questions were often terse and vague, and on many occasions I was avoided or ignored. For a few who seemed sympathetic to my academic quest, I was advised to say that I was "their friend" and explicitly mention their names if ever I was to encounter any difficulty with the local youth gangs. By contrast, the children and teenagers in the *kampung* were far less inhibited and constrained.

It would have been ideal to reside within the settlement. But because of an imminent eviction in order to make way for redevelopment, space was at a high premium and residents were not inclined to rent out wholly or partly their premises to a "stranger" despite my numerous inquiries. As an alternative, I rented a room in a middle-class residential estate on the southern fringes of Petaling Jaya, about 10 minutes away by motorcycle from Kampung Nehru.

The *kampung* has a long-standing reputation as a nest for criminals and youth gangs. Numerous police raids in the past have caused the residents to be understandably guarded, letters of introduction notwithstanding. To allay their suspicions, I decided to appear in the safety of public places like the *kedai makan* (eating shop) and the *pasar malam*

(night market). As the majority of the *kampung* residents were Hindus, and the Mariyamman *kovil* and Hindu calendrical festivities attracted a sizeable number of residents, the *kovil* also became a regular place for visits and conversations. Similarly, the Seventh-Day Adventist church served the same function. Time did not permit me, however, to devote my attention to the local Muslim *surau*. In retrospect, frequenting these places of worship further offered a measure of personal safety as at the end of fieldwork a resident commented that I was probably "not disturbed" by the youth gangs because of this apparent interest in the *kovil*.

There was one other major hindrance undermining my fieldwork that needs to be raised. As I was not able to secure additional funds for fieldwork, a substantial amount of my time and energy was spent working on a series of part-time and piece-meal jobs. Nevertheless, whenever possible frequent visits at various times of the day to the *kampung* were made. Despite these formidable obstacles, I was fortunate enough to make a number of casual acquaintances and establish an ongoing relationship with a few residents. Given these circumstances, I decided that it would be inappropriate (and perhaps not ethical nor wise) to conduct household surveys or visit homes without any explicit invitations from the residents. Thus, as evident in the ethnography, various surrogate indicators were sought instead. The main sources of my understanding of Kampung Nehru were gleaned from casual street interactions and observations, and situational and snatched conversations held over an extended period of time in informal settings and on terms comfortable to the residents. To help appreciate the wider contexts of my research question, formal and semi-structured interviews were also conducted with various community organisers and religious leaders outside the *kampung*.

Throughout my fieldwork period, I monitored the newspapers daily. When I wanted to have a better idea of large-scale and significant religious events like Thaipusam, I reviewed old newspaper articles covering nearly two decades. Moreover, in order to make sense of the wider phenomena of the genealogy of cultural categories, I referred to the colonial archives, religious and political tracts, housing layout plans and maps, newsletters, and graffiti for clues, anomalies and potential surprises. For this purpose, I utilised the libraries of local universities, Christian theological seminaries, the Hindu Sangam, and the National Archives in Malaysia and Singapore. In Britain, archival materials were also sought in the Public Record Office, British Library, Royal Commonwealth Society (lodged in the University of Cambridge) and the Seventh-Day Adventist Newbold College situated

in Bracknell, England.

Fieldwork in Malaysia was conducted between June 1994 and April 1995. At that time, Kampung Nehru had about 300 households comprising a mixture of Tamils, Telegus, Malayalis, and Punjabis. Tamil residents formed the overwhelming majority (about 80 percent). The *kampung* itself is only one of a seemingly amorphous and contiguous clusters of other squatter settlements that sprang up within the last two to three decades after the demise of tin mining in the locality. A large majority of the earlier settlers were second or third generation low-caste, working class South Indians originating from plantations or smaller towns in the state. Currently, "Indian" and "Malay" residents constitute the main ethnic groups in the locality.¹² In recent years, the physical landscape has taken on a dual face as a sizeable portion of the squatter settlements has been transformed into modern low-cost housing by a quasi-government agency. Moreover, further changes are imminent as the remaining half is to be redeveloped by a private housing company, and the residents face eviction and resettlement to low-cost flats in the next few years.

After about a month of fieldwork, I discovered that the *kampung* itself had been studied a decade earlier (Rajoo 1985a).¹³ Rajoo's study focused on strategies of adaptation used by the squatter residents in a competitive urban environment. Following the notion of local-level politics, as formulated by FG Bailey, Rajoo argued that unlike the traditional Indian village where the hierarchical vertical linkages of caste dominated relationships, the categories of caste and ethnicity become a particularly significant resource for political manipulation and personal advancement in post-colonial and multi-ethnic Malaysia. Shifting horizontal alliances between various sub-caste groupings come to the foreground as they are negotiated to secure various material benefits. Consequently, factional struggles between aspiring local leaders frequently arise as they manoeuvre to persuade residents that they possess the prerequisites and abilities for this task.

At this point, it is pertinent to mention in a summary fashion two other key doctoral studies of squatter settlements in Malaysia. Rosemary Dillon's (1991) study of another Indian squatter community situated not too far from my fieldwork site took issue with the notion of marginality as applied to squatters and the urban poor. She contended that marginality is rooted more in the structure of society and its systems of production rather than in people's inherent cultural attributes. Squatters are not powerless victims but people with different needs and priorities. Squatter housing was viewed as a conscious self-

help activity undertaken to integrate themselves into the urban landscape. In comparison to the rubber, oil palm or coconut plantations, the city was cited by most of her respondents as a far better place to live. Despite their comparatively low and disadvantaged status, the transition from economic and social dependency in a cloistered plantation to an urban setting where there are possibilities of upward mobility and home-ownership was favourably viewed. A similar emphasis informed Azizah Kassim's (1985) study of a Malay squatter community in Kuala Lumpur. Against Oscar Lewis' depiction of a cyclical and impassive "culture of poverty" amongst the poor, she portrayed a vibrant community with a discernible local-level power structure that not only regulated social relationships within but also mediated their interests to the world outside. Squatters actively sought patronage from and allied themselves with politicians of the ruling political parties as a strategy for circumventing laws, and safeguarding their interests against eviction and victimisation by the local authorities. In the works cited, it is recognised that in addition to kinship, ethnicity, and friendship the religious affiliations of squatters provides a significant resource for defining groups, framing identities, and informing social ties. Put differently, religiosity functions as one of a possible number of cognitive maps that help individuals recognise the contours and boundaries of their local landscape. Moreover, a substantial overlap between the religious and political roles of local leaders in these settlements indicates that these domains are not inherently impermeable.

Spatialising hegemony and resistance

This thesis draws on various key ideas discussed in the preceding sections but it also essentially recasts them in terms of spatiality and polysemic landscapes. Of late, these themes have become a fertile ground for a number of research ^{projects} involving a conjunction of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary perspectives (e.g., see Bender 1993, Gupta and Ferguson 1992, Hirsch and O'Hanlon 1995, Mitchell 1988, Noyes 1992). By spatialising "domination", "resistance", and "religion" in the context of urban Malaysia, I wish to elucidate the potency of the production of space and spatial practices in hegemonic processes (Lefebvre 1991) and of the social construction of space in everyday practices (de Certeau 1984). Indeed, it can be argued that Gramsci's own stress on hegemony and his work on state control over everyday life, popular culture, and the relation between occupational and territorial structures reflects an implicit appreciation of the significance of space in the context of the growing complexity of modern capitalist society.

Mainstream anthropological theory has conventionally given considerable attention to registering the "voices" of an ethnographic locale but "spaces" and "places" are relatively undervalued and viewed as unproblematic analytical categories. But like "voices", these entities are historically specific, politically and socially situated, and therefore have multiple constructions. They are not transparent categories but act as heuristic referents constructed from a continuous cultural and moral exchange between people and the locality. Construed thus, proponents suggest that more fruitful discussions on various kinds of identity can be approached from the theoretical perspective of "landscape"¹⁴ further supported by ethnographic illustrations. If one of the characteristic features of a globalising modernity, as contended by Giddens (1990) is the "emptying of space" and the disembedding of culture and history into bits for rearrangement, how is "phantasmagoric space" then constituted in the context of local knowledge and practices?¹⁵ How are places rendered no longer stable referents for identity? By appealing to context, as Hobart (1986) reminds us, one is also attending to the plurality of perspectives, and the contending play of knowledge amongst various individuals and groups. The ability to assert that one's criteria of knowledge is legitimate vis-à-vis others is an exercise in power, and so by extension, are the contestations against these formulations.

Contemporary interest in the social meaning of place resonates with conceptual reappraisals of "village community" and "rural-urban" studies which find the notion of a clearly bounded Redfield-type "folk society" or "village" collectivities to be problematic.¹⁶ Not only are these "communities" difficult to verify in the sense of an empirical spatial reality but they do not also always correspond neatly with official or local delineations. Residents and households are more likely linked together by a myriad of subsistence and informal activities, ethnicity, kinship ties, and of political and religious affiliations and obligations. By the same token, even if the notion of the neighbourhood "urban village" is deemed to be amenable for an urban ethnography, the heterogeneity, density, and cultural complexity of the modern city often means that for some people this arena might not be equally significant in their lives as it is for others. This does not necessarily suggest, however, that there is no lack of political rhetoric to idealise the "village-community" in terms of social harmony and a repository of traditional mutual help.¹⁷ In many ways, the ethnoscape of Kampung Nehru, like many other Malaysian urban "village-communities", comprises residents from diverse ethnic and rural origins living cheek by jowl. With the backdrop of a formally sanctioned ethnicised political culture prominent for at least three decades, the suggestion that social actors embellish their routines and social behaviour to

express the essence of their own respective communities is plausible. For the unsuspecting and transient "outsider", a momentary blurring of the internal distinctions between residents, and the hardening of public boundaries might be a persuasive fiction indeed.

A place can also be viewed heuristically as a palimpsest on which successive generations of people have inscribed and reinscribed their labour and varied meanings. In de Certeau's (1984:117) words, space is a practised place. In the cultural process of naming and writing onto spaces, a familiar place is created only to be challenged and modified by other social actors leading to bodily and symbolic displacements. For this purpose, I have chosen to frame the thesis both along specific and general parameters. Whilst the historical specificity and ethnographic particulars of Kampung Nehru remain the main focus of discussion, there is also an attention to wider cultural and historical processes. Or stated differently, focusing solely on the synchronic "ethnographic present" of Kampung Nehru would be myopic especially when the cultural workings of power are put to question. The "present" is a problem to be explained and not assumed. Following Eric Wolf (1982), I "write the present as a history of power" and look at communities as not "closed systems" but constituting nodal points of intersection arising from overlapping relational "force fields". During particular historical moments when concentrations of political and economic power are intense, certain "vectors" are generated disrupting human arrangements over a wide field. Oppositional responses are provoked from individuals and communities of people who are put severely at risk.

The notion of a "force field" as an arena of struggles and manoeuvres is also invoked by Pierre Bourdieu to highlight the centrality of social relations to analysis. In one of his many hybrid definitions, he characterises a field

as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:97).

In other words, fields themselves are defined by the stakes which are at stake - land, housing, education, social class, prestige and so forth - and are of differing degrees of specificity and concreteness. Moreover, fields also present themselves synchronically as "structured spaces of positions" whose properties depend on their positions within these

spaces. For Bourdieu, the notion of "societies" is more profitably replaced by "fields" and "social spaces" which suggest a simultaneity of both conflict and competition. Characterised thus, human agents take up various positions within these structured spaces organised around the defining capital in appropriating various kinds of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital. Indeed, the existence of a field presupposes that there is a belief on the part of the participants in the legitimacy and value of the capital which is at stake in the field. Although the metaphor of the "market" recurs, its economistic tone is tempered by a strong sense of agency in juxtaposition to a structured framework of situated interests whilst at the same time the materialistic notions of acquisition and consumption are retained.

In Bourdieu's scheme, the reproduction of "structured structures" is mediated by social actors who have been predisposed by the cognitive and the meaning structures of the *habitus*. The *habitus*, in contrast to structuralist objectivism, is "the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations". In this field, it is assumed that certain kinds of knowledge are taken-for-granted (termed *doxa* by Bourdieu) especially when they pertain to power and domination. Certain questions are not asked and silence is discreetly maintained.

The issue of the interplay between discourse, power, and knowledge has been most prominently discussed by Foucault (notably 1984). Foucault essentially puts to question theories of power as repressive, unitary, external, and binary. More specifically, Foucault has drawn our attention to the "rules of discourse", to the ways in which "in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality" (Foucault 1980:216). Foucault's preference for "discourse" rather than "ideology" needs to be unpacked a little. "Ideology" presumes a distinction between true statements and false statements about the world, and that facts about the world help us to decide between them. Foucault contended, however, that "factual" statements rarely have this capacity as the very language we use to describe them interferes in this process. Language and discourse themselves are moulded and influenced by the play of motives and interests. "Truth", hence, does not exist outside of power as power operates so as to enforce the "truth" of any set of statements ("regime of truth"). As social practices entail meaning, all practices have a discursive aspect as well. Power, in short, rests in everyday social practices.

Both Foucault and Bourdieu alert us to the contestatory nature of social relations and the ways in which human actions are profoundly interest-oriented. As various social actors compete and struggle for social recognition, they also seek to legitimise specific kinds of knowledge and practices whilst at the same time excluding or marginalising others. Arguably, it is in "the city", a prismatic site of modernity, that these contending forces intersect most palpably. Indeed, "the city" as an arena for studying the kinds of social, cultural, and religious innovations in the face of the processes of industrialisation, technologisation, and modernisation has a long pedigree beginning with the founding fathers of the social sciences.

How this field is contextually framed in Malaysia forms the focus of discussion in *Chapter One*. Here, I examine the genesis and use of certain social taxonomies like "squatting", "ethnicity", "religion", and "social order" that in nationalist discourse are made to appear as something natural, permanent and external to ordinary life. I suggest that they can be viewed as cultural categories bearing the marks of invention, appropriation and administration. However, instead of "writing the present" in a historicist, and exhaustive fashion, I focus on key historical moments in order to emphasise the saliency of these themes in postcolonial urban Malaysia. They constitute a kind of "symbolic violence" (in Bourdieu's terms) where an articulation of systems of symbolism and meaning are experienced as legitimate, meaningful, and durable. As a particular social map of the world, the ethos of colonialism deploys various tropes and discursive devices that legitimate its moral supremacy, prestige and right to rule. Particularly strategic to its technology of looking, mapping and ordering the world is an amalgam of "outsider" and "insider" knowledge for overlaying familiar metropolitan and totalising practices over local indigenous categories. A continual promotion of a system of governance to maintain social order has cultivated a public culture of apoliticalness and self-censorship as well as oblique ways of expressing dissent and resentment.

Chapter Two narrows the discussion to examine the relationships between "squatting" practices, urbanism and urban planning priorities. I suggest that whilst "squatter settlements" are often portrayed in terms of a "lack" or "absences", these images do not necessarily accord with lived experiences. Instead, certain social maps are being privileged in place of local knowledge and pragmatic practices. In de Certeau's terms, there is a need to distinguish the city as "concept" from the contradictory "fact" of the city.

The rest of the thesis shifts focus to the "ethnographic present" of Kampung Nehru in order to examine the continuity and discontinuity of the above themes. Four separate but interrelated domains are chosen as foci of discussion. *Chapter Three* narrates the various tactical negotiations that arise in the everyday practices of residents in juxtaposition with extraneous changes that are made to bear on them. Amongst others, I construct a collage of daily routines, describe the use of spaces by residents and street traders, and examine the kind of sociality suggested in the *kampung*. By giving attention to these mainly non-verbalised details, some of the ideologically salient aspects embedded in the locality are highlighted.

Chapter Four examines the ambience of domestic and communal spaces in Kampung Nehru, and compares this with the constructed images (*simulacra*) of modern high-rise housing. To do this, a partial window into living conditions and religious aesthetics in the *kampung* is opened to give a closer look at the residents' bricolage despite the material constraints in which they are embedded. Next, I discuss various marketing tropes used to persuade residents' of the superiority of modern housing. As cultural commodities indexing an idealised modernity, they elicit both acceptance and resistance.

The following two chapters examine the religious "arenas" that are constituted in Hindu and Christian spaces. In *Chapter Five*, I use the annual goddess festival of the Mariyamman *kovil* as a focal point of discussion to suggest the multiple valences that it has for Hindu residents. In particular, the spatialised idioms are apt as a vehicle for translating and parading a semblance of ownership and power over the locality, and in reconstituting a wider geographically imagined Hindu-Indian community. In comparison, I argue, in *Chapter Six*, that the SDA church members, made up of mostly Telegus, cognitively and discursively demarcate their world in oppositional categories and in the use of sacred space. Nevertheless, it is this precisely this ritual enclosure of cultural autonomy that allows a kind of "resistance" to be acted out against a perceived hostile world whilst at the same time aligning themselves with upwardly-mobile and modernising trends.

The concluding chapter (*Chapter Seven*) summarises and restates the key arguments of the thesis. A qualified reading of the notion of "everyday resistance" is suggested in the light of the ethnographic evidence offered. Rather than a clearly bounded cumulative concept, I argue that this notion should be spatialised and perhaps better be perceived as a multistranded metaphor with variable manifestations. Conceived thus, "everyday

resistance" is not incongruous with "compliance", and comes to the foreground with differing strengths and in different spatial and temporal domains.

NOTES

1. *Malaysia. A General Guide* tourist brochure published by the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism, March 1996.

2. For a succinct summary of various critiques to Third World liberation theology, see Ferm 1986 and Abraham 1990. See also Forrester 1988 for a broader discussion of the interface between politics and theology.

3. A Gramscian perspective on the nature of ideological struggle is pertinent here. It could be argued that Third World theological literature functioning as a counter-hegemonic discursive project does not merely argue for the alleviation of exploitation but also attempts to free the "common sense" of both subalterns and elites from contradictory consciousness through mutual dialogue, criticism and struggle. According to Gramsci, "common sense" is the ideological middle ground combining elements of a highly structured and coherent "philosophy" and "folklore". It is "good sense" but with the elements of "folklore" embedded. "Common sense" is constituted through the coalescence of contemporary competing ideologies and practices but also includes the fragmentary sedimentation of the culturally specific past. Because of this incoherence, critical reflection is particularly difficult especially for subalterns. Although "intellectuals" also bear a similar baggage, Gramsci contended that they, nevertheless, possess a greater capacity of critical analysis in order to rid themselves of the past. For subalterns, by contrast, the principal elements of "common sense" are informed by religious beliefs and practices (see Gramsci 1971:323-343, 419-425).

4. For example, see Adas 1979, Lanternari 1963, Thrupp 1962, and Worsley 1957.

5. Article 11 states that:-

Every person has the right to profess and practise his religion and, subject to Clause (4), to propagate it.

No person shall be compelled to pay any tax, the proceeds of which are separately allocated in whole or in part for the expenses of a religion other than his own.

Every religious group has the right

- a) to manage its own affairs
- b) to establish and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes; and
- c) to acquire, own property and hold and administer it in accordance with law.

State law may control or restrict the propagation of any religious doctrine or policy among persons professing the Muslim religion.

This Article does not authorise to act contrary to any general law relating to public order, public health or morality.

6. Scott had earlier studied peasant rebellions in Southeast Asia (see Scott 1976) which drew substantially on Edward Thompson's "moral economy" of the English crowd.

7. For recent critiques of the assumptions of "secularisation" theory as they pertain to Europe, see Dobbelaire 1987 and Turner 1988.

8. Kant had similarly envisaged the human subject as internally divided between reason and desire. He viewed the capacity for morality as guaranteed through the former rather than the latter. The rightness of action is engendered by rational calculations, and by abstracting universalisable principles from specific situations.

9. Said's orientalist thesis has been subjected to a number of criticisms. The most relevant is that his notion of the essentialisation of cultures itself tends to minimise the historical agency and heterogeneity of subalterns. But see his afterword in the 1995 edition of his book.

10. For critical discussions on Subaltern Studies, see Bayly 1988, O'Hanlon 1988, and O'Hanlon and Washbrook 1992.

11. This is a pseudonym. Similarly, all other names and places have been disguised.

12. As will be discussed in Chapter One, these are census categories premised on a racial ideology formulated during the Victorian era. In British Malaya, the first modern census exercise was conducted in 1871, and subsequent censuses show a progressive contracting of the diverse range of peoples into broad ethnic groups.

The 1991 census reported that there were 58.2 percent "Malays", 31.3 percent "Chinese", 9.8 percent "Indians", and 0.6 percent "Others" out of a population of 14,619, 976 in peninsular Malaysia. In terms of the religious ethnoscape, there were 57.6 percent adherents of Islam, 19.1 percent adherents of Buddhism, 7.9 percent adherents of Christianity, 6.6 percent adherents of Hinduism, 6.3 percent adherents of Confucianism/Taoism/other traditional Chinese religions, 1.4 percent adherents of tribal/folk religions, 0.5 percent "Others", 1.5 percent professing "no religion", and 0.1 percent "unknown". The category "Indian" comprised "Indian Tamil", "Malayali", "Sikh", "Other Punjabi", "Other Indian", "Pakistani", "Bangladeshi", "Sri Lankan Tamil" and "Other Sri Lankan".

13. I am grateful to Dr Rajoo for discussing with me various aspects of his study as well as the practice of Hinduism in Malaysia. Rajoo's study provided important background details for a neophyte ethnographer unfamiliar with Hinduism and the Tamil language.

14. It has been suggested that although the "landscape" is of an ancient Anglo-Saxon origin, it was re coined by male aesthetes, antiquarians and landed gentry in an emergent capitalist Western Europe to denote a particular "way of seeing" which corresponded with their expanding political spaces (Olwig 1993).

15. Elsewhere, he elaborates (1990:18),

In premodern societies, space and place largely coincided since the spatial dimensions of social life are, for the most of the population...dominated by 'presence' - by localised activity.... Modernity increasingly tears space away from place by fostering relations between 'absent' others locationally distant from any given situation face-to-face interaction. In conditions of modernity...locales are

thoroughly penetrated and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them. What structures the locale is not simply that which is present on the scene; the 'visible form' of the locale conceals the distanced relations which determine its motive.

16. Joan Vincent (1990:388ff) has contextualised this shift in the political climate of the late 1960s, and the influence of publications like Andre Gunder Frank's essay on the sociology of development, Fernand Braudel's *The Mediterranean World in an Age of Philip II* (published in 1972), and Immanuel Wallerstein's *The Modern World System* (published in 1974).

17. For example, see Alison Murray's (1991:64ff) discussion of the institutionalising of *rukun* and the more informal practice of *gotong royong* in Indonesia.

Chapter One
FRAMING THE MALAYSIAN LANDSCAPE:
Colonialism, Capitalism and Social Order

Writing a history of power

On the Petaling Jaya municipality map, Kampung Nehru is denoted as a rather large piece of deep green space adjacent to a purple conglomeration of light industrial factories towards the southern side of the township. A publicity brochure produced in the early 1980s introduced Petaling Jaya as the "most developed area in Malaysia", and highlighted to the reader the word, "Jaya" as meaning "success" in Malay.¹ A tourist or a novice might be forgiven for imagining Kampung Nehru to be a picturesque or idyllic village if the glossy map or its arresting name is taken at face value and without further investigation. Kampung Nehru is in fact identified in official parlance as a "squatter colony" or *kawasan setinggan*. Its history is similar to the hundreds of such settlements all over the country; a story of migrant people forging a habitable environment out of the defertilised, sandy, and wasteland laid bare by decades of open cast and dredging tin-mining activities. According to current land legislation and policies, Kampung Nehru together with another half a dozen similar settlements in the locality illegally occupies "state" and "private" land. Instead of a languid, clear river that undoubtedly flowed in the past, Sungei Penchala coursing the western boundary of the settlements is denounced in an official publication as the "most polluted river in the Klang Valley"² being a major dumping conduit for liquid waste, factory discharge, and the refuse of residents living along its banks. Decades earlier, the oldest portion of Petaling Jaya itself (commonly abbreviated to "PJ") was a "new village", an euphemism for one of hundreds of military-guarded resettlement villages created during the period of Communist-led insurgency in the aftermath of the Second World War. Subsequently, Petaling Jaya was transformed into a satellite township modelled on suburban housing schemes in post-war Britain.³

These phrases are not necessarily self-evident, enmeshed as they are in a politically and socially charged milieu that was critical for the formulation of the modern nation-state of Malaysia. Put differently, to limit the significance of Kampung Nehru solely to its "ethnographic present" devoid of a discussion of the wider social forces that went into framing its genesis is basically to adopt an essentialist, functionalist and ahistorical tenor. Instead, I draw upon Eric Wolf's notion that "communities are not closed systems" but a nodal point of intersection among overlapping relational fields in "open systems".⁴

However, instead of writing an exhaustive historicist narrative, I give particular attention to specific historical "moments" that illustrate the salience of some of these themes in postcolonial Malaysia.⁵ By offering an admittedly truncated and selective narrative, I represent the social realities of Kampung Nehru as a history of societal power. Various vectors that constitute overdetermined cultural categories like "squatting", "religion", "social order", and "communalism" are elucidated.

Analogously, I argue that the scripts of the Malaysian societal stage are to a certain degree already typecast with key social taxonomies which in turn have ramifications for the manifestations of "everyday resistance". Various historically engendered and culturally specific templates constrain and animate the possibilities that residents in Kampung Nehru (and beyond) have to live and work within, alongside and against. Their contexts, in other words, are enframed and entangled in various rules of governance, social interaction and *habitus* bequeathed by the era of colonial rule. More to the point, I suggest that colonialism can be construed as a way of looking, mapping, representing and ordering the world with its own sensibilities bracketed off. Colonialist (and colonialist-type) discourse operates as a spatialising practice that appropriates, produces and dominates space. As a particular kind of social construct, its adherents look to and employ various tropes and rhetorical devices that legitimate its moral supremacy and social status even if everyday social realities are contingent. Particularly strategic is an amalgam of "outsider" and "insider" knowledge for overlaying recognisable metropolitan coordinates over unfamiliar indigenous categories.

Codifying land and culture

Together with legalist definitions of land ownership and occupancy, being a "squatter" illustrates well its persuasiveness as a trope for defining and confining the movements and activities of individuals and communities. Indeed, as enshrined in the *National Land Code* and *Land Acquisition Act*, "the illegal occupation of land" has salience and cogency only within the logic of a colonisation and transformation of pre-colonial knowledge and localised land practices.⁶ Furthermore, insofar as "the squatter problem" is construed apart from its historically contingent roots it belies colonialist imaginations and capitalistic market categories and rationality. As Wolf has aptly observed, "property is not an economic but a social and political relation, ... and legal and political constitution exists, among other things, to guarantee property relations" (cited in Ghani 1995:29).

In British Malaya, as elsewhere in the Empire, the cultural category of property was constituted by a combination of intertwining practices. The "opening up of an empty country" for large-scale commercialised cultivation and mining activities were often not at cross purposes with a Christian-infused civilising culture⁷ as well as imbricated with the demands of "gentlemanly capitalism".⁸ With the introduction of the notion of private ownership, land registration documents, and the aid of scientific cadastral mapping, the belief that there was ownership before occupation or tilling of the land dislodged indigenous practices and the local economy. From the 1870s onwards when the British administration consolidated its hold first in the Straits Settlements and then progressively over the whole of peninsular Malaysia, the relationships between land and settlers became more entangled and problematic.

In the precolonial period, the peninsula was populated mainly by Malays and various indigenous peoples with varied notions of land tenure and cultivation. As elsewhere, the cross-cultural encounters between a foreign power and the local elites engendered the "invention of tradition" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) through a skewed portrayal of customs and customary law. For instance, William Maxwell, who was instrumental in drawing up regulations for another kind of land tenure as well as the judiciary system, made use of Malay legal texts (e.g., The Malacca Code) in stating these principles and evolving a land legislation that attempted to create a class of settled peasant cultivators.

Land is abundant, but the population is sparse; there is no restriction upon the selection and appropriation of forest land, and a proprietary right is created by the clearing of the land followed by continuous occupation. Forest land and land which, though once cleared, has been abandoned and bears no tract of appropriation (such as fruit-trees still existing) are said technically to be tanah mati, or "dead land". He who, by clearing or cultivation, or by building a house, causes that to live which was dead (meng-hidop-kan bumi), acquires a proprietary right in the land, which now becomes tanah hidop ("live land") in contradistinction to tanah mati. His right to the land is absolute as long as occupation continues, or as long as the land bears signs of appropriation (Maxwell 1884:77f, emphasis original).⁹

The manner of land acquisition was termed *meneroka* or *membuka tanah* (literally, "to open up land"), or if done on a larger scale, *membuat negeri* ("to open up a state") or *berbuat negeri* ("to create a state")¹⁰ At various points, Maxwell's translations - as Winstedt's, another colonial administrator after him - of various classical Malay legal texts exhibit a

tendency to overlay English notions of land ownership on native land practices. In other words, whereas in "Europe [where] man-land relations were the determining feature of the economy, a situation made possible because all land was owned, either by the state or privately, and ownership gave exclusive rights to land...in the indigenous Malay economy human labour was the form of capital that underlay economic relations" (Kratoska 1985:19). No formal nor centralised legal machinery existed to enforce these "proprietary rights" over the land and it was thus desirable that these pioneers consolidated labour in order to maintain food production over a period of time.

Similarly, the setting up of a new *kampung* also depended on the assistance of consanguineous kin. The *penghulu* or *ketua* (village headman), in particular, was characteristically the founder pioneer who through his acumen and vision could attract other settlers to join in the establishment of the *kampung*. However, in comparison to later periods where he would become also an important unit of a bureaucratic-patronage machinery, his authority and prestige at this stage was more locally circumscribed and contingent on his persuasive abilities (e.g., see Nonini 1992, Rogers 1989, Shamsul 1986). Territorially, his jurisdiction could expand with population growth and the extension of village boundaries, thereby elevating his status to that of an *Orang Besar* (territorial chief). When tin mining activities on a larger scale commenced, access to land was acquired and controlled by Chinese clan leaders, who in turn sought the recognition of and paid taxes to local chiefs. Negotiations between different clans were often necessary to arrive at compromises as to who should operate in various areas. From the British point of view, the notion of land as a marketable commodity could only be realised when the web of social obligations embedded in it was progressively stripped away and reworked. Additionally, in the place of a plethora of trading practices and currencies, a universal foreign monetary system became the new measure of social and economic relationships.

For decades, the British had adopted a policy of non-interference in the Malay states since setting up bases at the Straits Settlements (a Crown Colony). The reasons were primarily economic but the painful lessons of the 1857 "Indian Mutiny" in British India did not go unheeded. Consequently, administrators became more circumspect in the manner in which indigenous political and religious structures of the colonies were to be modified. For years after the event, the Government of India pursued a *laissez-faire* policy regarding Hindu customs. However, with easier travel conditions as a result of the opening of the Suez Canal (in 1869), British women and missionaries arrived in greater numbers.

Increasingly, the rulers of India and of other colonies became a more conventional and Christian-thinking elite. By the 1870s, the balance of power in the political terrain in Europe had once again shifted and the perceived expansionist plans of various nation-states (like Germany, Italy, Russia, and even the USA) into Southeast Asia alarmed certain British colonial administrators. The justification for the tenor of Colonial Secretary Lord Kimberly's instructions to Sir Andrew Clarke (as the newly installed Governor of the Straits Settlements) in response to Prime Minister Gladstone's query epitomised this anxiety:

The condition of the Malay Peninsula is becoming very serious. It is the old story of misgovernment of Asiatic States. This might go on without any very serious consequences except the stoppage of trade, were it not that European and Chinese capitalists, stimulated by the great riches in tin mines which exist in some of the Malay States are suggesting to the native Princes that they should seek the aid of Europeans to enable them to put down the disorders which prevail. We are the paramount power on the Peninsula up to the limit of the States, tributary to Siam, and looking to the vicinity of India [.] and our whole position in the East [.] I apprehend that it would be a serious matter if any other European Power were to obtain a footing in the Peninsula (cited in Cowan 1961:169).

Local feuds between rival Chinese secret societies over the control of tin-mining fields in Selangor and Perak as well as disputes between Malay princes over the rightful succession to the Perak throne provided Andrew Clarke, the opportune moment for formal intervention. The Treaty of Pangkor that ensued not only resolved these disputes but also ensured the stabilisation of lucrative Straits trading interests in tin.

Clause 6 of the Treaty stipulated that the Resident's advice "must be asked and acted upon on all questions other than those touching Malay religion and custom". To be sure, the notion of the cultural markers of "Malayness" changed over time. Passages in the *Sejarah Melayu* (compiled about 1612) suggested a descent-based definition and was used as a term of prestige and exclusivity confined to those who could trace their ancestry to Sumatra. In later periods, Malays were differentiated from non-Malays by their observance of a set pattern of etiquette and behaviour believed to originate in the court of Melaka. On the part of the British, it was felt necessary for the purpose of effective administration to distinguish clearly between Malays and non-Malays. Again, the prior experiences of consolidating colonial rule in other parts of the Empire provided useful lessons in the art of government through classifying and codifying elite native practices. In the Treaty, a Malay was rendered as one who followed Malay custom (*adat*), spoke the Malay language, and professed Islam. This formula was generally adopted in all Malay states as they fell successfully under British control, whether or not there was a treaty provision to that effect

(Gullick 1987:fn 1). The notion of non-intervention in "Malay religion and customs" was particularly informed by the events of the "Indian Mutiny", and there were fears of a collective *amuk* against the aggressor should Malay society be unduly pressured (Ibid.:363, 367). Additionally, the discernible growing strength of Islam in the region as a result of increased pilgrimages to Mecca via the Suez Canal and the regular incidence of anti-colonial uprisings in other parts of the British Empire and in neighbouring colonies were not insignificant considerations (Andaya and Andaya 1982:153f, Lanternari 1963:263ff, cf. Iletto 1992).

By itself, the Treaty does not demarcate a radical change in British imperial policy but signified rather the culmination of continuous pressure by Straits merchant interests on the Colonial Office in formalising a profitable but hitherto *ad-hoc* interaction that varied in intensity from people to people and from place to place. The legal basis for the broad powers of the British Residents was contained in the deceptively causal form and loosely worded texture of the treaties. As in other colonies elsewhere, the post-Treaty milieu saw incremental efforts in consolidating "traditional" society and its social order through a codification of unwritten localised and pragmatic customs into a unified textual system. The purpose of understanding these practices was for mediation, control and administration. Additionally, an inculcation through education of an alternative set of habits and values associated more with centralised dominance and economic productivity was constituted and enforced.¹¹

Later, it was argued repeatedly that a more systemic and widespread political and administrative control was needed if any comprehensive development of the peninsula was to be possible. This was progressively done following the suppression of a string of "peasant revolts" in Negri Sembilan (1872), Perak (1875) and Pahang (1890). By 1909, British hegemony from the point of view of legislative control was securely established in the strategic and lucrative areas of the Malay States. Through treaties and legislation, the Malay indigenous political structure was incrementally emptied of its economic base by the abolition of corvée labour, slavery and tributes but without disrupting its sacral notion of sovereignty which had been buttressed further by the theological underpinnings of Islam (Abdul Fatah 1988, Hooker 1972). Victorian administrators and senior-ranking soldiers found the Malay rulers' gentlemanly qualities of courtesy and profoundly aristocratic outlook appealing but their seemingly fatalistic (attributed to Islam) and relaxed attitudes rather uncondusive for consolidating colonial rule. However, although British officials had

intended to preserve and enhance the symbolic influence of the ruler in whose name they governed the State, the side effects of the policy was to disrupt the public and ceremonial life of the Malay ruler. Aristocratic rule and patronage was visibly ritualised and enacted in the *balai*, a public place for the promulgation of royal decrees, conferral of titles to chiefs, and so forth. The British policy of concentrating power at an alternative centre for the purpose of colonial surveillance and administration effectively meant that the Malay ruler was now confined to the state council chamber and suspended in a cultural vacuum without any real contact with his chiefs and *rakyat* (commoners). Later generations of Malay rulers managed to weave a symbolic compensation out of a selective adoption of the practices and habits of European royalty in amalgamation with traditional and Islamic elements in order to project the royal presence (Gullick 1987:20ff).

Quite early on, British administrators had chosen to reject indigenous notions of land tenure mainly on the grounds that the nature of Malay legal codes was unsuitable for a commercial and monetised economy (Lim 1977:17ff). What was envisioned was a system that gave security of tenure to landholders and land which was free from rival claims and encumbrances. By the 1830s, land enactments were passed for the Straits Settlements of Penang and Malacca which would later become a basis for a standardised land tenure for the whole peninsula. In 1880, William Maxwell was dispatched to South Australia to study the *Torrens Systems* of land administration. Subsequently, he integrated the *Perak Regulations of 1879* with the *Torrens System* to form the basis of the land laws for Selangor. Modelled on English land law, the new system of land tenure reconfigured all land as ultimately held by the Malay ruler, who had the power to alienate land. Alienated land was now in lease form and subjected to payment of an annual premium and fixed quit-rent. A proper survey was to be made before any issue of titles for the expressed purpose of facilitating or settling land claims. Two methods of land alienation were introduced. The leasehold affected areas categorised as town lands and large holdings which between 1897-1926 were lands of 100 acres and below, and after 1926, lands less than 10 acres. To accommodate the traditional or customary mode of land acquisition as practised before, alienation by registration was also adopted.¹² Village lands and new holdings developed by Malays were entered into *mukim* registers which meant that Malay-held land was now transformed into a commodity item for exchange - it could be bought, sold, mortgaged or transferred. Embodied in these seminal regulations were the interlocking concepts of allowing considerable latitude for the appropriation of land by immigrants and foreign investors, and the preservation of the "native" rural peasant identity. With these strategic redefinitions, foreign and local

capitalists were able to acquire huge tracts of lands for plantation agriculture and mining.

In the early 1890s, Maxwell had also drawn up the protective clauses as embodied in The *Selangor Land Code of 1891* to preempt the possibility of powerful commercial interests buying up Malay *kampung* land, and in the process unwittingly creating the troubling spectre of a large class of landless and potentially rebellious peasants. This was initially repealed with Maxwell's departure but another wave of alarm resurfaced around 1910 with the rapid expansion of the rubber plantation industry. District Officers in Selangor reported that about 1,548 parcels of Malay *kampung* land were sold to non-Malay merchants and capitalists between the period 1909-1910 alone. With the expressed purpose of protecting the Malay "race of yeoman-peasantry" which "was deluded by visions of present but transitory wealth" (Ong 1987:18f), British administrators legislated the *Malay Reservation Enactment of 1913*. The enactment not only demarcated special areas for Malays only but also restricted their cultivation to food-producing crops rather than cash crops, ostensibly to insulate them from the vagaries of capitalism. To accommodate the legal position of the waves of immigrant Javanese and Sumatrans from the Dutch East Indies who initially came as contract labourers or peasant farmers in the immediate post-Pangkor Treaty period, the contemporary definition of a "Malay" had a relatively more inclusive tone. A "Malay" was "a person belonging to any Malayan race who habitually speaks the Malay language or any Malay languages and professes the Muslim religion" (Hooker 1972).

As noted earlier, the obverse side to this conserving face of land policies was a liberal approach to opening up "empty lands" for commercialised agriculture and large-scale mining activities. The development of the plantation system of agriculture, in particular, exemplified the shifting fortunes and strategic control in the terrain of competing commercial interests and market trends. Plantation agriculture was first practised in the Straits Settlements in the early nineteenth century but later spread to states like Perak, Johor, Selangor and Negri Sembilan. The Chinese planters chose commercial crops (gambier, tapioca, pepper) that grew well in most localities, required no specific skills or large capital outlay, and yielded quick returns. When prices dropped, interest shifted to more commercially profitable crops like sugar, coffee, tea and rubber (Jackson 1968, Lim 1977). In comparison, the Europeans with their extensive experiences in plantation agriculture in their colonies around the world had a more regimented and large-scale approach (a "plantocracy"). Predicated on the belief that plantation agriculture would be more successful under European methods, the colonial government set in motion policies

that eventually sought to wrest control from their Chinese competitors. Chinese farming methods were condemned as environmentally unsound which necessitated a switch to more permanently cultivated crops.

In comparison, European-run plantations were run on a large-scale and very labour-intensive, and Chinese contract workers, and later indentured Indian labour, were imported to work on them. Sugar was the first successful plantation crop chosen but by the end of the nineteenth century, a combination of factors - problems with labour supply, competition from beet sugar in Europe and stiff competition from Java and Cuba - led to experimentation with other crops. Once again, colonial policies and legislation discouraged the cultivation of sugar-cane. The collapse of the coffee industry in Ceylon around this period (1869-1899) because of the ravages of fungus (*Hemileia vastatrix*) saw a rush of European planters to Malaya during the coffee boom of the 1890s. Unlike other early plantation enterprises which were pioneered by the Chinese, coffee was introduced and mainly cultivated by Europeans. Favourable land terms and generous planting loans to the planters were once again facilitated by the colonial government. However, by the end of the 1890s, the coffee industry in Malaya too became competitively unprofitable and the increasing worldwide demand for rubber in the light of scientific discoveries with wide commercial applications saw yet another shift in focus and emphasis (Ramasamy 1991).

Liberal land concessions with low land rents, stipulated land use, and favourable sites were created and manipulated in favour of large estate agriculture under European ownership. The non-European smallholder, in comparison, was left largely to his own resources to experiment with a mixture of cash cropping, subsistence agriculture and waged labour. For instance, *The Federal Land Code of 1896* deemed 640 acres as sufficient to be an estate under European control whereas agricultural lands below 100 acres were subject to forfeiture if left uncultivated for 3 years even if rent was paid. Smallholders producing the same cash crops for export were often penalised as instanced in the restrictive policies of the *Stevenson Scheme of 1922* and *International Rubber Regulation Agreement of 1934*. Credit facilities and the latest technical know-how about agricultural methods (particularly rubber clones) were not readily extended. As mentioned earlier, the colonial view that the Malay was to be a "yeoman-peasant" excluded from mainstream cash crop cultivation became translated into legislation like the *FMS Malay Reservation Enactment (1913)* and the *Rice Lands Enactment (1917)*. Malay agricultural activities were to be confined to cultivating rice as a subsistence crop supplemented with fruit trees. However, as

documented by some scholars, many Malay smallholders chose to defy these restrictions and discriminations, and evolved survival strategies that mitigated their vulnerability to volatile market forces (Lim 1977, Ong 1987, Shamsul 1986). For newly arrived immigrants with little capital or a long-term attachment to the land, sedentary agriculture was scorned in favour of the pragmatic appeal of quick cash returns to be made in the mining, rubber plantation, urban and commercial sectors.

The various recruiting methods used to procure migrant labour as well as the contemporary working and living conditions of waged "coolies" in some of these plantations have been well-documented (Sandhu 1969, Jain 1970, Stenson 1980, Ramachandran 1994). In comparison to the pre-British period when Indians came freely as traders, an overwhelming majority of the later arrivals were typically South Indians that were from low ranking castes ("untouchable" and "depressed" castes), illiterate and landless. The engineering of a mass migration of an ideologically subordinate workforce is tied to specifically European economic and political expediency. This is epitomised in Sir Frederick Weld, the Governor of the Straits Settlements, who argued "it was advisable in a country like this [that] the preponderance of any one Eastern nationality should not be excessive" and that the desirability of Indians as migrant labour was because they "are a peaceable and easily governable race".¹³ Informed by experiences of colonial rule elsewhere, the "preponderance of the Chinese over any other races" was viewed as strategically unwise and "should be counterbalanced, as much as possible, by the influx of Indian and other nationalities".¹⁴

Plantation living had many perils and difficulties. Not only was the mortality rate high due to malaria, cholera and dysentery but the "coolie" also had to endure a regimented daily work routine. Because the plantation was frequently isolated, social interaction with other ethnic groups was uncommon. Inside the plantation, a paternalistic "total institution" was created with a pervasive hierarchy linking the European manager via the *kirani* down to the labourer. Moreover, the *kirani* could be further constrained by debts to the local sundry and toddy shops, both of which were normally licensed by the manager. His religious needs and obligations were also kept alive through compulsory deductions from wages at source that went partly towards the building and maintenance of the estate temple. Although various pieces of legislation were enacted over time to "protect" newly arrived immigrants to British Malaya, breaches of contract were frequently inequitably dealt with. Whilst labourers were severely punished (e.g., fines, flogging) the offences of

the managers went unheeded. When the labourers were repatriated back to South India, many were worn out and sickly and the Tamil idiom of "sucked oranges" was used to describe their lot. These conditions, however, were not passively received as various documents in the colonial archives attest. There are numerous references to individuals deserting the plantation ("absconding coolies"), organising "riots" and "disturbances" resulting in clashes with the police authorities.¹⁵ These kinds of localised "resistances" eventually gave way to more overt and collective confrontations in the periods immediately preceding and following the Second World War through the work of the trade unions (for details, see Ramasamy 1992, Stenson 1970, cf. Jomo and Todd 1994).

"Empty" spaces, the civilising process, and town planning

In addition to the brute facts of servicing capitalist interests, various scholars have argued that attention should be given to studying how such practices in the colonies are spun out of a fabric of European cultural notions about desired progress and aesthetics, and how they, in turn, reconstitute the dominant discourse. For instance, Mary Louise Pratt has characterised colonial encounters as occasions for ideological self-redefinitions where "the systematising of nature in the eighteenth century and nineteenth century represented not only a European discourse about non-European worlds...but [also] an urban discourse about non-urban worlds, and a lettered, bourgeois discourse about non-lettered peasant worlds" (Pratt 1992:34).

The colonisers' gazes typically incorporated a developmental vision of human and social progress. To varying degrees, these authors share the discursive phantasm that a terrain is "pristine", "empty" and "untamed" until occupied and cultivated. Boundless space was viewed as chaotic, meaningless, and threatening. Amongst others, writing played an important role in the strategy to appropriate space by reorganising it into a network of discrete spaces and rendering it recognisable in the colonisers' own terms. In other words, the spatialising power of discourse was thus integral to the colonisation process (e.g., see Gregory 1994, Noyes 1992, Rose 1993, Ryan 1994). The objectification of the world also required that it be represented as ordered and certain, as a world akin to an endless spectacle and exhibition (Mitchell 1988). Thus, a typical trope of colonialist power and desire demands that the space it occupies be unbounded, readable as a text, and that its reality is coincident with the emergence of an imperialist narrative and history. Its discourse is nondialogic, its enunciation unitary and unmarked by the trace of difference

(Bhabha 1993). As an entity which is abstract, usable, malleable, homogeneous, and universal in all its qualities, the conquest of space is deemed a *fait accompli*.

Put differently, the rhetoric of empire embodied a privileged representation of the world. Maps, in this respect, provide a significant means of naming and endowing places with various idiosyncratic meanings. In the ancient world, cartography and maps had an amalgam of purposes and utility; artistic, cosmological, religious, and strategic. Because of the friction of distance, this chronological net of navigational and locational maps was fragmentary, but successively expanded and reworked with travels and explorations over an ever-widening radius to faraway unknown places. Their representations were didactic, contextual, piece-meal and improvised with little attention or emphasis for borders. Thongchai (1994), for instance, has shown how in contrast to indigenous ancient maps, the use of modern maps allows for the imagining of a "geo-body" that identifies "Thai-ness" in terms of a "We-self" vis-à-vis others outside nation-state boundaries.

Modern maps were derived from Europe where the premise of philosophical dualisms engendered the creation of scientific cadastral surveys which became a much more unambiguous spatial net. A cartesian geographical view of the world enhanced a visual culture that placed a premium on "non-subjective" geometric terms (Gregory 1994, Lefebvre 1991). As the demarcation of "absolute spaces" became accepted and routinised, landowners and ruling powers utilised these new representational tools for the definition of property rights in land, for taxation, and for the redrawing of national and regional boundaries. Monetary value eventually became the single measuring yardstick for the buying and selling of commodified space (Harvey 1989a:176f).

Endemic wars in Europe in the late nineteenth century particularly impressed upon military tacticians the utility of maps in acquainting them with the geographical features of the region over which troops and weapons were manoeuvred. All over Europe, the setting up of geography societies, schools and chairs in universities were energetically promoted especially by the army and navy. Similarly, a renewed interest in overseas colonial empires spurred the belief that geographical knowledge and skills were advantageous in negotiations over national spheres of influence and territorial partition. In Britain, it would be pertinent to quote at length the ruminations of the influential Colonel Sir Thomas Holdich, then vice-president of the Royal Geographical Society.

It is perhaps, in those international negotiations and agreements which concern the

political status of great countries, and determine their boundaries and their respective limits of their responsibilities, that the danger of inaccurate geographical knowledge is greatest, and the results of it are the most disastrous. Truly, this period in our history is well defined as the boundary-making era. Whether we turn to Europe, Asia, Africa, or America, such an endless vista of political geography arises before us, such a vast area of land and sea to be explored and developed; such a vision of great burdens for the white man to take up in far-off regions, dim and indefinite as yet; that it can surely be only by the grace of Providence that we shall finally emerge from the struggle to rearrange the world's partitioning, without deadly contest with others whose interests in these new arrangements are hardly less than our own. And I may, perhaps, be permitted to say, that just as the Providence of battles usually favours the biggest battalions, so it is likely that the widest geographical knowledge will prove the best safeguard against misunderstandings, and will at once dispose of such false estimates of the value of portions of the world's surface here and there as have occasionally brought England perilously close to the dividing line between peace and war. By geographical knowledge I do not mean simply that knowledge of the Earth's surface which we gain by surveying it. I mean also a knowledge of those ordinary laws of nature which decide the configuration of mountains and the flow of rivers, where certain influences must inevitably lead to certain conditions.¹⁶

With the extension of British rule to the Malay States in 1874, intimate knowledge of this kind becomes strikingly evident in the historical records. As information is the lifeblood of imperialism, administrators were required to travel extensively to explore their territories ("the grand tour"), and to commit their observations meticulously in daily journals. These were further supplemented by reports relayed back to the metropolitan centre of the Empire. Subsequently, with a more established network of administration units, the District Officer ideally became the subordinate eyes and ears of the Resident.

The District Officer should aim at possessing complete information about the conditions and needs of his District - every road, path, river, village and hamlet in which he should know thoroughly. It is in his power ... to acquire very detailed knowledge of the circumstances, and trading family connections of the principal native inhabitants, and to have such an acquaintanceship among them that he will be able to judge the value of the information to be obtained from, or assistance to be afforded by each...Knowledge of one or more of the native languages, of the principles of English law, and of the practice of book-keeping are essential...If he can survey, make roads, sail a boat, so much the better (cited in Sadka 1968:216).

It has been also suggested that in the encounters between various European capitalist cultures and their overseas colonies, the colonisers were keen to gain control over both the material and semantic practices through which their would-be subjects produce and reproduce the bases of their existence and well-being. In some instances, these practices had ambivalent interlocutors. In her study of missionary activity in South Africa, Jean Comaroff has contended that "Christian symbols provided the *lingua franca* through

which the hierarchical articulation of coloniser and colonised was accomplished" (1985:2). In particular, she identified the non-conformist missionaries as the most ambitious ideological and cultural agents of the Empire. The social origins of British churchmen accounted for their strenuous attempts to reconstruct the native world in the name of God and Great Britain. Nurtured by an imperial vision of a triumphant bourgeoisie during the Age of Revolution, they celebrated hero-worship and the epic quest in which the responsible individual navigated a moral career of self-improvement. This quest drove them to the far ends of the British Empire to build a new "Empire of the Spirit" which would not have the contradictions of a rapidly industrialising and secularising European society (*Ibid.*). This mythologically and romantically conceived society was to be a space in which spiritual authority remained unquestioned. Moreover, through a regime of material and linguistic changes the Tshidi people were gradually inducted into European discourse involving the ideological practice of rational argument and empirical reason. This subsequently led to the Tshidi objectifying and inventing for themselves a self-conscious coherence and distinctness which evolved into a modern Tshidi ethnicity.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the increase in the number of missionaries who volunteered to work in frontier areas laid open by the British Empire was significant. The mid-century missionary adventures of David Livingstone in Africa popularised through novels and tracts had contributed to the general public's increasing interest and openness to overseas missionary work.¹⁷ Additionally, this impetus was given urgency through the waves of revival movements and reformulation of evangelical piety within England. Perceptibly, the stereotype of an early missionary as a "godly mechanic" who was of humble background and education gave way to a flood of candidates from public schools and university backgrounds. Christian missions become accepted in the public mind as a beneficent operation, and in church discourse as vital to the life of the church universal. Many of these new-style missionaries brought with them to the "mission field" presuppositions that defective upbringing and theology were the reasons that earlier mission work was unimpressive and not comprehensive enough (Walls 1984; also refer to Piggin 1974, Stanley 1990, Williams 1980).¹⁸

Seen retrospectively through the lens of postcolonialism, the imbrication of both the missionary and imperialist projects would not be difficult to substantiate historically in other European colonies in Asia as well.¹⁹ However, what remains perennially contentious is the question of the extent and content of the long term impact of powerful Christianising

forces amidst contemporary vibrant indigenous religions. A lasting legacy could be unearthed in the realm of language and imageries. During this period, a striking and recurring allegory is the linking of European forms of cultivation and agriculture with Christian salvation in sermons and popular literature. Embedded as the authors were within their own societal fabric of moral sensibilities of landscapes, weather and health, this was often translated and projected into binary terms of opposing hostile and immoral (or amoral) conditions. The tropics, for instance, were "dark lands", populated by pagans, heathens and barbarians who needed enlightenment and "benevolent assimilation".²⁰ Alternatively, traveller-explorers spoke romantically of preserving the natural beauty and riches of paradisaical landscapes, and the interests of simple, effeminate and child-like natives from the clutches of Western and Asian capitalistic exploiters (e.g., Savage 1984). For colonial administrators who had to ensure a minimal level of productivity and social order, they regarded as inevitable the physical, mental and moral deterioration for anyone who stayed too long in the tropics. Hill-stations were constructed as a temporary recluse from the debilitating heat but even then children could not be reared beyond a certain age and had to be sent back to England for "otherwise, they will degenerate physically and morally" (Keltie 1897:315). In the lowlands, the simple hut of the Bengali peasant was transformed to meet the requirements of the European commercial and governing class giving rise to the Anglo-Indian bungalow. All over their colonies, the bungalow-in-its-compound became the symbol of the new European political and cultural presence (King 1984). Occasionally, the effect of climate was used to explain differences in the moral fibre, health status, and work habits between Europeans and non-Europeans.²¹ Indeed, disease, pestilence and health as mediated via the native body became a palpable (albeit contested) site of colonial intervention through the introduction of European medicine and sanitation (e.g., see Arnold 1988, Manderson 1990).

A preoccupation with the social order of the colonies overlapped with a perceived malaise within the shifting material conditions of European cities themselves. For instance, in Victorian Britain, the Industrial Revolution had catalysed the phenomenal growth of cities and in its wake massive social upheaval. New urban streets disturbed and disoriented many bourgeois Victorians with their traffic noise, dirt on pavements, smells from tanneries and industries, street trading and entertainers who plied their wares or begged in "a wholly unregulated fashion" (Wilson 1991:29). Victorian intellectual culture was also heavily influenced by evolutionist reasoning which identified a lower order of life with certain living conditions. With a concern with delimiting specialised functions and hierarchies a

highly elaborate scheme of differentiated spaces between the workplace, residential areas and the burial grounds was devised and put into place (Kuklick 1991:94ff). Social reformers (notably Lord Shafesbury, Patrick Geddes and Octavia Hill) tended to view urban life as moral cesspools. They supported movements to create parks, squares and children's playgrounds to bring the moral sense of the natural and idyllic countryside into the urban built landscape. A large corpus of literature (reports, novels, essays, articles) was produced revolving around life in the cities with its working class districts and slums. At the same time, a textual interest in "the city" at home paralleled the growth of anthropological studies of the life, myths, religious beliefs and cultural practices of "savages" and "natives" in faraway places. Nurtured in such a milieu, it is not surprising that for a widely celebrated British traveller and Victorian feminist, the potential productivity of "empty lands" and climatic conditions did not pass unremarked. Isabella Bird, whose books were best sellers in the late nineteenth century described Selangor as having

great capabilities, and if the difficulties of the labour question can be satisfactorily disposed of, it is likely that the new offer of leases for nine hundred and ninety-nine years, subject to improvement clauses, will attract a number of planters to its fertile soil and wholesome climate (Bird 1883:209).

In this scheme of things, the "interior" was "not occupied" in precolonial Selangor insofar as there is little archaeological evidence of large and permanent settlements with architectural wonders comparable to the major civilisations in the ancient world. Most settlements, instead, tended to be dispersed, small and situated alongside or close to rivers. For their staple diet, native and immigrant Malays carved out plots of land - *sawah* (wet rice field) - to cultivate rice. In comparison, peripatetic indigenous peoples set up temporary abodes, hunted animals, utilised jungle produce, and practised shifting agriculture according to a cyclical itinerary. However, with the influx of the Bugis²² (from the Celebes) and the establishment of the maritime Selangor Sultanate, larger settlements began to emerge. Dutch colonial records indicate that by the 1680s, there were already large Bugis settlements in Klang and along the Selangor estuaries. From the late eighteenth century onwards, Javanese and Sumatrans were also crossing in greater numbers to the peninsula. A substantial number of the Sumatrans were Minangkabaus who moved into present-day Negri Sembilan and the southern part of Selangor bringing with them a more elaborate *sawah* technology and a matrilineal kinship and land tenure system (*adat pepatih*).

In precolonial Malaya, the movements of peoples were comparatively unorchestrated. Whatever the motivations for migration - ecological, religious, trade, safety

- the abundance of jungle and land made the logic of accumulation unnecessary and even undesirable. In the event of an oppressive *Orang Besar* or a Malay ruler requiring unbearable taxes or the danger of heated disputes deteriorating into warfare, flight rather than confrontation was the preferred medium of resistance for the ordinary people (cf. Adas 1981). During the 1860s and 1870s, intermittent strife in coastal Selangor over the Bugis royal seat depopulated some of the estuarine settlements as villagers migrated *en masse* to more peaceful areas. Subsequently, one of the first projects undertaken after formal British intervention was to have an explicit liberal immigration policy to repopulate these areas. In the state of Selangor, where mining and cash cropping activities were most intensive, a skeletal framework of transport linkages was laid, not only to facilitate transportation of goods but also to attract population into the "interior".²³

The rising fortunes of British intervention can thus be mapped in terms of the rise of Chinese mining centres, the ebbing of Malay political power, and the decline of *kuala* (estuarine) settlements. Inland villages set up as a result of tin mining activities were initially highly dependent upon the major river systems of Selangor. Where rivers did not reach into the interior, bridle paths and bullock cart tracks were laid. In the mid-1880s, when bullock carts were found to be too slow and of limited freight capacity, a railway was constructed to connect Kuala Lumpur and Bukit Kuda (situated close to Klang). Klang occupied a strategic position with the building of a jetty in 1876 to handle the increase in cargo handling and agricultural produce. By 1894, as a result of extensive networking and progressive upgrading of tracks, roads and railways, Klang became regarded as the most important planting district in Selangor, and a gateway to Europe, particularly Britain. Under the Malay sultans, Klang was the royal town after Kuala Selangor and Jugra but British administrators preferred Kuala Lumpur, a small mining town, as the new colonial capital.²⁴

Early town planning²⁵ provisions, not only for Kuala Lumpur but for other regional towns elsewhere, reflected a bias towards maintaining their status as a collection and distribution node with minimal land allocated for industrial activities. This dual role was typical of other colonial cities in Southeast Asia which were to be a conduit for transporting the products of the hinterland onto the world market, and to distribute European consumer products into the hinterland. The growth of local industries was not encouraged for fear of competition with European imports, nor was it considered commercially wise to create a large urban workforce which would deplete the flow to

mines and plantations, and the food production of smallholders. Market gardens granted to Chinese farmers were of a temporary nature, and easily revoked when the land was required for other development. As in British India, the monumentalist architecture of Empire and European spatial patterns took shape with the construction of cantonments, public squares, playing fields and imposing public and religious buildings.

As mentioned earlier, the penetration of European capital into the agricultural and mining sectors in the peninsula did not result in the massive movements of rural Malays to the urban centres. Male migrants from China and India²⁶ were viewed as suitable replacements to fill this vacuum. In time, a colonial divide arose between the traditional landscape of the Malay royal courts and *kampung* "protected" by the British administration, and the new predominantly non-Malay urban centres where private and public enterprises flourished. Thus, the making of a "plural society"²⁷ and colonial urbanisation imbricated one another, and worked together to attenuate cultural differences and to carve out ethnic and class enclaves in British Malaya. This colonialist politics of space was further informed by contemporary evolutionist theories and debates on human races and cultural differences. Demographic patterns and projections of various ethnic groupings were assiduously monitored through periodic censuses which would later form the template for postcolonial social engineering (Hirschman 1986, 1987). Integrally embedded in these ethnological discourses were also discussions on sexuality, morality, and sexual conduct. Generally, sexual liaisons between European males and native women were tolerated and indeed were often considered one of the perks of the colonies (Hyman 1990). This in turn, however, posed a threat to the moral justification for imperial rule. To resist the prospects of racial assimilation and miscegenation, the notion of Englishwomen as guardians and marks of the superiority and stability of the English race became more pronounced in the colonies (Stoler 1989, 1992). As the cultural gaps between the ruler and the ruled progressively narrowed through the liberalising and civilising influences of education,²⁸ exclusionary prescriptions and conventions were also recast to underline the ruler's difference. Cultural boundaries and social distances were mediated through segregated housing, places of work and recreation (the club, race track, and cricket grounds), and notions of the place of the family in reproducing a civil society.²⁹

"The Emergency"

As the preceding paragraphs have suggested, colonialism is more than a collage of

economic, political and military phenomena. There is also a concomitant cultivation of a sensibility of moral supremacy. This section basically reiterates a variation of the same theme by examining a specific historical juncture. My objective here is to illustrate how colonialist projects cannot be conceived as routinely monolithic and unyielding in the face of emergent historical forces. Despite their homogenising tendencies, these projects were not seamless particularly as the colonies were situated at the liminal fringes of Empire where non-Europeans and Europeans cohabited. Contending social agents and ambivalent historical circumstances necessitated reappraisals, compromises, and the working out of new strategies. In recounting the key elements of the "new villages episode during "The Emergency", I illustrate facets of the technologies of control but also the historical exigencies leading to the genesis of Petaling Jaya.

During the first half of the twentieth century, economic growth in British Malaya was continually impressive and valued as the most profitable colony in the Empire with its export earnings (particularly from tin and rubber) in the crucial post-war years continuing to exceed those of all other colonies and Britain itself.³⁰ The 1920s and 1930s were also periods of growing nationalistic and anti-colonial movements in various parts of Asia. These sentiments from their respective homelands (in particular China and India) similarly filtered into the political landscape of British Malaya but were largely expressed as competitive communal nationalisms.

Decades of liberal immigration policies had built up a sizeable non-Malay populace in order to bolster the economic and infrastructural objectives of the colony. By 1931, a census exercise estimated that about 31.2 percent of the Chinese and 21.1 percent of the Indians were local-born, and an increasing proportion of them refused free repatriation in favour of permanent settlement. To be sure, this was considered favourably by the colonial authorities as contributing to a stable core of labour. Local leaders of Straits-born Chinese and Chinese capitalist interests as well as the Indian professional class increasingly advocated and pressured for a more centralised Malayan administration with full citizenship rights for all the existing population. But the Malay aristocracy and elites were adamantly opposed to these demands. Perceiving the growing non-Malay population as a threat to their authority and ethnic survival, they counter-demanded restrictions upon the influx of Chinese and Indians, and Malay preference in government employment and education. In 1927, Sir Hugh Clifford, the Governor of the Straits Settlements and High Commissioner for the Malay States, had asserted that democratic and socialist theories and

doctrines "are spreading like an infection bringing with them, too often, not peace but a sword". He went on to say that

I feel it incumbent upon me to emphasise, thus early in my allotted term of office, the utter inapplicability of any form of democratic or popular government to the circumstances of these States. The adoption of any kind of government by majority would forthwith entail the complete submersion of the indigenous population, who would find themselves hopelessly outnumbered by the folk of other races (cited in Emerson 1964:174).

The rationale for a stable political order imbricated economic considerations as well. By the 1930s Johore had become the largest producer of rubber, and Kelantan and Perlis, the largest producers of rice. But all of them lay outside the Federated Malay States (FMS) structure. A scheme to rationalise the fragmented constitutional system of British Malaya was envisioned to facilitate economic monitoring and exploitation. As embodied in Sir Cecil Clementi's de-centralisation proposals of 1931, they sought to consolidate the British alliance with the conservative Malay aristocratic elite by giving the impression that the formal authority of the sultans was respected but to be followed later by re-centralisation into a single administrative unit. By decentralising administration to the individual Malay States, their "Malay character" would be asserted and the Chinese and Indian populace were effectively excluded from power as non-Muslims were ineligible to be subjects of the Malay rulers. Earlier moves to annexe these states had been contemplated in 1875, 1879, 1880 and 1895 but were abandoned largely due to the intervention of local colonial officials who felt that it would be unwise and unnecessary (Hua 1983:61f). De-centralisation at this stage, once again, could not be effectively implemented in the face of vocal opposition from European rubber and tin interests who preferred the security of the well-trying FMS and which coincided with the dissent of the Chinese and Indian professional classes.

Whilst the project was momentarily shelved, this episode became a historical precursor to subsequent political negotiations. Strategically employed to full effect was the colonial legalist fiction of Malay sovereignty. Citizenship and other related rights in the Malay States were denied to the non-Malays until these areas were themselves superseded by the liberal *jus soli* constitutional principle of *Merdeka* (independence). At the same time, the demands of the non-Malay elite were accommodated through a selective process of appointing Indians and Chinese spokespersons who were less inclined to anti-colonial and class-based sentiments to sit on Legislative Councils. Exhibited in these considerations is a

"divide-and-rule" colonialist governmentality that was later transformed into a concern with "communalism" and "communalistic" politics.³¹

Colonialist projects, however well conceived, occasionally encountered unanticipated events and fortuitous agents. One such watershed event that hastened the end of a world-embracing empire was the Second World War as fought in the Asian arena. The pre-war colonial order founded on the common-sensical notion of accommodation with both the Malay aristocracy and the wealthy Chinese mercantile class had been seriously undermined. Particularly deflated was the myth of "white superiority" when the local populace witnessed the ease of the collapse of British power in the face of the Japanese invasion and occupation of the colony. The military disaster of 1941-42 was profoundly humiliating as well as materially damaging, and vitiated those conditions which had been fundamental to the viability of the old-style colonial regimes. Since it was largely the Chinese populace who offered the only serious resistance to Japanese rule, it was they who were singled out for intimidation and often brutal treatment during the occupation. In contrast, the Malay rulers who did not evacuate with the retreating British Administration were regarded as largely collaborating with the Japanese invaders. The main resistance force, the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), was again comprised mainly of Chinese as well as being dominated by the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). When the Japanese were defeated in mid-August 1945, the MCP was left as the only immediate effective political-military organisation in the country ahead of the returning British. In terms of an Indian labour and political movement, the Japanese occupation of Malaya itself was not without ironies. The difficult material conditions, the years of self-reliance and self-help, and the anti-Western nature and appeal of the Indian Independence League (IIL) further nurtured the seeds of politicisation and appeal for a pan-Indian identification (Stenson 1980:86ff). India's own Independence struggle and the re-visit of Jawaharlal Nehru to the region in 1946,³² to protest against the British government's arrests and trials of Indian National Army (INA) personnel for their involvement with the Japanese, generated widespread discussions of the status of diaspora Indians in a milieu of political flux and emerging possibilities. Nehru's exhortations and counsel were reported in detail in the local newspapers. In one of them, he said,

Indians abroad must remain united and guard their rights and uphold their heads proudly as Indians - children of a country with a great past and a greater future. On India and Indians devolved a great task. India had to win freedom for herself, win it for Asia and unite Asia for preserving peace in the world and advancing the prosperity of millions of under-privileged peoples.³³

Catalysed by this visit, the Malayan Indian Congress, (MIC) was formed in August 1946 as a broad platform in addressing issues of citizenship and representation. The MIC was closely modelled on the Indian National Congress and sought to occupy in the local political landscape a role comparable to its counterpart in India (Arasaratnam 1970:114ff, Ampalavanar 1981). The lofty aspirations of Nehru for Indians in Malaysia has arguably remained wishful thinking given the historical circumstances under which they have been politically and economically disadvantaged. Prior to 1957 when British Malaya gained political autonomy from Britain, there was a far more diverse and fragmented array of Indian political groups but this was increasingly transformed to a more communal stance following the success of the dominant ethnically-demarcated political parties like United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) and Malayan Chinese Association (MCA).

With the foundations of the pre-war colonial order rendered fragile, both the British and various local political groups competed to address the eventuality of a "self-governing" nation-state, and subsequently, the complex issues of re-constructing a viable "national identity" out of the Furnivallian "plural societies" of the colonial era. As before, the British administrators miscalculated. Attempts to simplify and unify the earlier complex constitutional and administrative structures of the tripartite Federated Malay States (FMS), Unfederated Malay States (UMS), and Penang and Malacca into a "Malayan Union" (with liberal citizenship provisions for Chinese and Indians) met with unexpected widespread Malay protests aspiring for a "pan-Malayanism", a political union of Malaya and Indonesia (Roff 1967). At the same time, a high level of labour unrest notably in the rubber estates and public services (ports and railways) picked up momentum once again, and considerably worried the colonial authorities with the prospect of a debilitating stalemate or even defeat in its economically most lucrative colony. With the government introducing more stringent legal and policing controls, the MCP eventually resorted to armed struggle in early 1948. Despite early appeals to act decisively from a few quarters, particularly European planters and estate managers, various government officials were unconvinced at this stage and believed that the threat was overrated. However, at the same time the colonial office grew increasingly alarmed that imperial rule in British Malaya, built on collaboration with the Malay elite, was in serious jeopardy as the MCP claimed cross-communal support for its struggle. The killing of three European planters by the MCP in June 1948 provided a fortuitous event for the government to address all these issues by declaring a state of "Emergency".³⁴

The phrase "Emergency" is significant. British Malaya was not the only colony that was in the state of unrest. Grenada, the Gold Coast, Nigeria, Uganda, Nyasaland and Kenya had "emergencies" similarly declared between 1948-60 during the immediate post-war period. Furedi (1994) has suggested that the term "emergency" was a public relations concept of Whitehall, coined to mask wars which were in effect political challenges to colonialism. The aftermath of the Second World War had engendered a moral crisis of imperialism, and the spectre of the flood of nationalist uprisings elicited a preoccupation with national security and special policing powers. Militant anti-colonial activists were redefined as "law breakers", "bandits", "criminals" or "terrorists" implying that wider coercive powers and a suspension of political liberties were needed to regain a resemblance of civil order and economic productivity.

Both colonial administrators and social scientists in touch with the Colonial Office tended to portray life in the pre-War era as comparatively idyllic and harmonious but which was subsequently disrupted by "foreign" influences. For instance, Edward Gent, a high-ranking administrator, offered a revisionist view of history. He opined that

before the war southern Indian estate workers were relatively unsophisticated. Most of them were immigrants and largely of the depressed classes, and were satisfied with their conditions of employment and showed little desire or aptitude for organisation along trade union lines. They were, however, easily influenced and excitable and on occasion have shown themselves to be dangerous tools in the hands of irresponsible leaders. During the Japanese occupation, Indian labourers suffered serious hardship, experienced great upheavals and dislocation, and were subjected to considerable propaganda. As a result, they have developed a new consciousness of their political and economic position.³⁵

Other politicians, whilst adopting a contrasting argument, nevertheless similarly deflected the political content of the struggles by raising the spectre of the disjunctive moral effects of "Westernisation" which would lead to "detribalisation" and "spiritually denuded" subjects (see endnote 39). By early 1950, when it became increasingly clear that the government was losing ground to the MCP, a new integrated machinery involving both the police and the military was conceived. Lieutenant-General Sir Harold Briggs, a retired divisional commander, was appointed as Director of Operations "to plan, coordinate and direct the anti-bandit operations of the police and fighting forces" (Short 1975:234). Based on a rapid tour of the country and briefings in London and Singapore, Briggs outlined a plan of action and strategy which envisioned creating a feeling of complete security in the populated areas through greater territorial domination. Coordinating this massive



undertaking were a supreme Federal War Council and a chain of State and Settlement War Executive Committees meeting regularly. Life in post-war Malaya thus assumed a more regimented mode with the introduction of identification cards (ICs) and curfew hours but under a veneer of normality. Various sections of the country were also starkly juxtaposed as "Black Areas" and - when they were rid of Communists - "White Areas". The "Briggs Plan", as it came to be known, also appropriated the strategy of "hamletting" used in other parts of the British Empire to isolate and, in effect, monitor support for Communist guerrillas operating mainly from the jungles or as undercover agents in towns (the *Min Yuen*). Creating a boundary - the perimeter fence - between the guerrillas and the local population made tangible and circumscribed what had previously been an almost ubiquitous battle line. As any action inside the perimeter fence on behalf of the government would be interpreted as hostile to the guerrillas, "new villagers" would do nothing except under the excuse of compulsion. At the same time, it was argued that whilst there were elements among those "hamletted" who would assist the government, measures still needed to be taken to ensure that possible contacts with the guerrillas be considerably reduced. This perceptive grasp of spatial realism resulted in the compulsory resettlement of a large mass of people from remote rural areas to the periphery of towns. An original estimate of the exercise was put at less than 300,000 people but by the end of 1954, over 570,000 were forcibly resettled (Stubbs 1989:101). Although Malays, Indians and the "Orang Asli"³⁶ ("indigenous peoples") were involved in the resettlement exercise, the primary target was the Chinese.

By the late 1940s, a unique historical conjunction of factors - the Depression of the 1930s, mechanisation of tin mining, Japanese persecution, uncertainties of post-War economy - had led to an unprecedented number of Chinese families choosing a combination of cash cropping, food production and seasonal waged labour in preference to full-time employment (Loh 1988). Many occupied land "illegally" in Malay Reservations, Forest Reserves and privately-owned plantations and mining areas. As before, the government had tacitly allowed this to happen partly to alleviate unemployment and preempt social unrest, and partly to boost local food production. Temporary Occupation Licences (TOLs) were issued and Food Production Reserves were established in the mid-1910s, between 1920-22 and then again in the 1930s. By 1948, however, even before the outbreak of the "Emergency", the security and disjunctive implications of "squatters" for the status quo were becoming obvious to the authorities (Ibid.:102f). Indeed, it was this specific group which was seen as the weak link in the war against terrorism. A special Federal

Committee headed by Sir Alec Newbould was set up in December 1948 to provide a brief study and remedial recommendations. Not unexpectedly, the committee advocated a more stringent control and enforcement of prevailing land policies and law. However, one of the more significant proposals of the committee which was subsequently not followed by the government pertained to granting the "squatters" greater security of tenure through the issue of semi-permanent forms of probationary titles. Short-term security factors overshadowed all other considerations in the politically unsettled milieu of the early 1950s. In explaining the rationale for the wider policing regulations and collective punishment needed in combating terrorism and lawlessness, Sir Henry Gurney appropriated a biblical parable: "the Government will do all it can to distinguish the sheep from the goats, but it is really for the sheep to distinguish themselves and to ensure by their own actions that they are not mistaken. There are still some people who are sheep one day and goats the next".³⁷

The government's mode of separating the sheep from the goats - resettlement - was viewed with mixed feelings by the Chinese "squatters". While many resettled willingly to escape harassment from both the MCP and police or were attracted by the prospect of titled land plots, there were also numerous others who had no choice in the matter. Occupying these "new villages" involved uprooting whole communities and lifestyles. Forced resettlement was conducted without any prior warning and usually commenced at the crack of dawn because of the size of the operation and the distances to be covered. A contemporary eye-witness account by a missionary has documented the logistics and conditions under which people had to cope:

One day a lorry and soldiers would arrive at one of the tiny squatter hamlets, and the people would be told that they must pull down their houses, pile the wood of which they were made, their furniture, hens, ducks - in all their possessions, including themselves - on the lorry, and be moved, one mile, two miles, ten or twenty miles to the nearest new village. Here every family was given a plot of land on which to build a house, each house being twenty feet from its neighbour. Grants of money were made to help with the rebuilding, but for the people this compulsory move, leaving behind growing vegetables and fruit trees, meant great hardship. In some villages each family was given a roof and poles with which they could build their new home, using the wood they had brought with them from their old houses. In other villages large communal houses were provided where the people could live until they had built their own. Wide earth roads ran at right angles between the houses. About every 200 yards there was a waterstand and tap where the people could take their clothes to wash, or from which they could carry baskets of water to use in their own homes. Round each village there was a double barbed-wire fence, which at night was flood-lit. People were searched both coming in and going out, to be sure they were not taking food to the Communists. Later, restrictions were relaxed, as the surrounding country was cleared of Communists, and people were allowed to go in and out freely during the day time. Only at night

were the gates shut (Carpenter 1955:16f).

The hurried nature of the resettlement programme stirred up a host of problems. Without enough and sufficiently trained staff, impressive layout plans were ignored or not adequately interpreted. Poor sanitary conditions led to fear of increased incidence of malaria, enteric fever and dysentery. The chosen sites of the "new villages" were often on tin tailings or flood-prone areas which were hardly conducive to farming. Food rationing and restriction to prevent supplies being passed on to the Communists "outside" the perimeter fence did not allow for sufficient nourishment of farmers who worked long hours. Although a small allowance was provided for rebuilding and subsistence, the high demand for building materials led to rocketing prices. Security was difficult to maintain with the initial shortage of barbed-wire - in 1951, only 56 out of about 350 "villages" had double-fencing and even fewer had perimeter lighting. Most of the Resettlement Supervisors (RS) and Resettlement Officers (RO) were recruited from overseas and could not speak Chinese. Inter-ethnic relations were strained as many interpreted the war as between Malay soldiers risking their lives against a Chinese guerrilla movement on one hand, and the government incomprehensibly providing Chinese with material benefits on the other (Stubbs 1989:98ff).

A shift away from a coercion approach was gradually adopted by the government after a series of unexpected events in 1952 - the ambush killing of the High Commissioner, change of government from Conservative to Labour in Britain, and widespread low morale amongst Europeans in British Malaya amongst others. A retired general was appointed to play the role of a *supremo*, merging the roles of a High Commissioner and Commander-in-Chief of the government machinery. In Malaysian history textbooks, the Emergency is synonymous with Sir Gerald Templer, so trenchant was his authority and personality during this period of Malaysian politics.³⁸ From the beginning, he shrewdly recognised that a "social experiment in democracy" could be wrought out of a military expediency. Expressed tellingly as "winning the hearts and minds" of the populace, part of this strategy involved the setting up of local councils in the "new villages" to give the semblance of normalcy. Formerly the Director of Military Intelligence at Whitehall, he was acutely conscious that the war with the guerrillas also extended beyond the physical boundaries of perimeter fences to the more intangible realms of ideologies and the exigencies of everyday living.³⁹ Indeed, he was sensitive to anti-Government resentment that was aroused as a result of the compulsory migrations. From a relatively unrestricted lifestyle of a "squatter" working his own land to that of an enclosed and controlled "new villager", there were not

unfounded fears that Communist secret agents could tap into this sense of resentment and malaise for their subversive campaigns although it is probable that many villagers were equally intimidated by the Communist as well.⁴⁰

The financial cost of maintaining the Emergency campaign was high, and even with the sizeable drop in government revenue due to the decline in rubber and tin prices after their Korean War peak, Templer contended that to cut down expenditure on items like social welfare was to concede strategic ground to the MCP (Cloake 1985:277f). Nonetheless, he realised that with limited government funds there was much scope for voluntary work from the various welfare and missionary agencies. To expand considerably the social services⁴¹ within the settlements, Templer required personnel who were conversant in the relevant Chinese dialects, and who could understand Chinese society and culture. Besides upgrading Chinese Affairs Officers to a pensionable scheme, he realised that obtaining the aid of former missionaries to China would help conveniently fill up the positions of Resettlement Officers. In his letter to Oliver Lyttelton, the Colonial Secretary, he reported:

I have been working hard on the whole business of the Social and Welfare Services. The British Red Cross are sending out another twenty-five mobile hospital units. St John are also joining in and I hope to get the Women Volunteer Service properly organised out here. I have appealed to the Conference of Missionary Societies and to the College of Propaganda in Rome to do what they can to send out as many China-trained missionaries as possible for work in the new villagers, whether in a missionary role or in a medical missionary role. I am doing the same thing with the Methodist Church in America and have had a bit of a showdown with the Malayan Medical Council as to whether American Methodist missionaries and nurses will be allowed to practice in the new villages and kampongs, even on a non-fee basis. I think I have won. They are a selfish lot of devils... (Ibid.:280).

His communication with the Chairman of the Conference of British Missionary Societies, however, utilised a more familiar Christian imagery:

These resettlement areas are fruitful soil for any seed, wheat or tares. They are the most important battle-fields for the soul of this country today...From the point of view of the Government (quite apart from that of the Christian faith) the most effective people to exploit this opportunity are missionaries...We want evangelists, and doctors and nurses and teachers.⁴²

Similar overtures were also made to the Roman Catholic Church. His appeal, in turn, was forwarded to the Vatican for careful consideration. After an initial period of delay and an exchange of correspondence, a significant number of mission societies and missionaries eventually made their way to the "new villages" (Roxborough 1992a:20-23).

Protestant missionary bodies also recognised that there was a real human need to be met in addition to an unprecedented opportunity for evangelism and church planting. But decades of missionary work punctuated by the traumatic events of China and the post-war period had impressed upon missionary societies the dangers of being overtly seen as the religious arm of Western imperialism. Negotiations with various officials were thus carefully conducted and weighed despite enthusiastic overtures from the government. It would appear, inferring from indirect evidence, that the British government viewed Malaya in comparison to other colonies elsewhere as relatively untroubled by widespread militant uprisings and anti-colonial movements drawing from the utopian imageries of Christian and Islamic scriptures and traditions (cf. Iletto 1992). Additionally, the acquired experiences and wisdom of colonial rule elsewhere suggested that "primordial" loyalties and indigenous systems be sociologically understood and carefully monitored in the event of the necessity of preemptive action.⁴³ In the less subtle conditions of the "Emergency", Christian missionaries were explicitly not allowed to work in Malay "new villages" to avert accusations by a nascent Malay-Muslim nationalist movement of abetting in proselytisation.

From the vantage point of the present, some missiologists and evangelists are wont to depict the comparatively low number of conversions as attributable to misplaced theological priorities and a weak spiritual basis. Alternatively, this period is depicted within the logic of an unfolding biblical drama. But the contemporary literature certainly does not reflect a diminished sense of urgency and purpose. The unanticipated spatial phenomena of the "new villages" presented itself to various Protestant mission boards as "opening new doors". Missionary outreach was not only fortuitous, facilitated as it were by circumscribed populated areas, but the situation also conveniently tackled the problem of relocating hundreds of Chinese-speaking western missionaries displaced a few years earlier by the "closed door policy" of Communist China.⁴⁴ Subsequently, the degree and extent of cooperation between mainline denominations was unprecedented with a New Villages Coordinating Committee set up by the Malayan Council of Churches (MCC) in early 1952. Its explicit plan was to advance "the Christian 'occupation' of villages by workers of the various groups" (Fleming 1956:105). Workers included ordained ministers, evangelists, teachers, doctors, nurses and welfare personnel, and they provided an impressive range of services such as children's and youth work, guides and scouts, Sunday-schools, women's work, literacy and night classes. Although it was recognised that there were disadvantages in being associated with the government, the committee had five representatives - the Roman Catholics had their own - on the Federal Government Coordinating Committee set

up by General Templer which included all other voluntary agencies like the Boy Scouts, St John's Ambulance, and the Red Cross. By the end of 1959, it was reported that 450 "new villages" were open to evangelistic work and that 220 missionaries representing 8 different missionary organisations were working in 333 of them (Hunt *et al* 1992:292).⁴⁵

Maintaining social order and national security

In the post-Emergency period, the perimeter fences were dismantled, and many settlements disintegrated. But most "new villages" remained and evolved into thriving communities with schools, recreation halls, temples and churches still intact. Many were eventually enveloped by encroaching townships, and ironically, many are becoming prized targets for re-development. However, in the early days of forced resettlement other paths were chosen by those who refused to move into these "villages". Thousands migrated instead into existing towns, and because of housing shortages and financial reasons erected unauthorised dwellings or moved into dilapidated town buildings - into the "crevices" and "margins" of the city. Demographers note that the first significant rapid urban growth rate in peninsular Malaysia coincided with this intercensal period (1947-57) with up to about 10 percent of the total population resettled into areas that usually exceeded 1,000 persons. As a result of resettlement, the number of "urban centres" - defined in terms of areas with a population in excess of 10,000 - increased from 163 to 400.

Outside the "new villages", the colonial government set about systematically weeding out any vestiges of radical unionism and anti-colonial sentiments. In July 1948, the Register of Trade Unions began to serve notices on all organisations which had not yet complied with the provisions of the amended *Trade Unions Ordinance*. By 1949, the number of registered members was down to about one-fifth (about 40,000) the level of 1947. The overwhelming majority of workers were left un-unionised. Radical trade unionists were systematically arrested or were victimised by employers. The only unions permitted to survive were those of government, clerical and skilled employees, and consisting of and led by Indians who were known to be staunchly anti-Communist. Later, with the momentary rise in wages stimulated by the Korean War boom of 1950-51, these unions took on a "moderate" stance whilst still rigorously eschewing political affiliation and activities. Their roles as formulated by the government and employer were to facilitate orderly collective bargaining, minimise wild-cat strikes and to counter Communist agendas. From the late 1940s to the early 1950s, about 800 Indians who were known or suspected of assistance to

the MCP were detained without trial; a few were executed for murder charges but most of them were repatriated to India under the *Banishment Ordinance*.

In comparison to resettling the Chinese squatters, Indian estate workers in targeted areas were reorganised into more centralised labour lines with the intention of cutting off ties with Chinese and Indian radical unionists. Estate managers were given extensive policing powers. In the mornings, workers were searched for extra food before they went to the fields and by night they were locked in. Under the Japanese occupation, organised religious activity was banned or carefully monitored. For instance, in urban churches sermons had to be submitted to the Ministry of Religion a week in advance, and soldiers and officials were subsequently present for Sunday worship. With the return of the British forces, the European estate managers quickly revived the *panchayat*, estate temple and its festivals viewing religion as a useful bulwark against the Communist irreligious stance. The *panchayat*, transplanted from South Indian villages, operated as a caste council responsible for maintaining social order and settling caste disputes. In the Malaysian plantation context, the temple committee formed the *panchayat*, and from the 1930s onwards were given the added task of mediating labour-employer relations.

In the face of rising militancy of the workers or disorganised labour in some cases, the conservative functions of the *panchayat* were viewed beneficially (Ampalavanar 1981:55, Jain 1970:356-365, Wiebe and Mariappen 1978:150-160, cf. Arasaratnam 1970:151). But in some estates, this attempted throwback to a pre-war colonial plantation hierarchy supported by a *kangani-kirani* alliance was resisted. Controversies and disputes arose over the planning and organising of the *Amman* goddess festival, central to the religious landscape of plantation estate temples.⁴⁶ The *modus operandi* of the plantation embodied a "total social institution" encompassing economic, legal, religious and moral dimensions. Thus, the *kirani* (clerk), representing a distinct and privileged ethnic group, was conscripted from different high ranking castes and ethnic communities (e.g., Malayalees and Jaffna Tamils) and usually were better educated. In addition, as most contemporary labourers could trace their forbears' recruitment to a patron *kangani*, their relationships were permeated with a sense of ambivalence inherent in a dyadic patron-client complex. Collectively, the *kangani* and *kirani* acted as intermediaries to the European plantation manager. As in British India, evidence suggests that attempts were made to sacralise these relationships through the Hindu idioms of *prasada* ("leavings"). At the annual *thiruvila*, the plantation manager and other colonial officers were treated as valued guests-of-honour -

they were garlanded, entertained with folk dances and presented with offerings (Wiebe and Mariappen 1978). In return, gifts of sweets and money were given to the devotees. Revealingly, plantation managers were sometimes known by the honorific names of *periyai durai* (lord or master) or *amma appa* (mother-father), fitting well the description of what Eric Wolf has termed the "split-personality" of "old-style plantations" in which surplus goods are not only produced but there is an equal attention to self-maintenance and status consumption.

In the earliest stages of "The Emergency", the government had also initially banned the public celebration of religious festivals of the Chinese and Tamils particularly in the urban centres to preempt possible avenues of potential agitation (Collins 1991). But under the "hearts and minds" strategy, such festivals were recast as an invaluable ally against Communist atheism. Nonetheless, these events were closely monitored with the legal requirement of a police permit. If there were processions, plans of the intended route had to be submitted prior to the event. During the unfolding of the festivities, both uniformed and plain-clothes police personnel were present for purposes of crowd control and surveillance.

The colonial legacy of surveillance and policing of everyday life extends to the modern postcolonial nation-state, and a brief outline of some of the relevant legislation would be pertinent. For instance, under Section 17D of the *Emergency Regulations Ordinance* (1948), the High Commissioner was empowered to order the collective detention of all the inhabitants of a circumscribed area without prior notice, ostensibly to allow an element of surprise in security operations. Following the adoption of the Squatter Committee Report in May 1949, another Emergency Regulation (17E) was added. This allowed the Ruler-in-Council in each state to issue eviction orders requiring all unlawful occupants to be relocated to specified areas after a month's notice. Other features of the Ordinance provided a legal basis for detaining persons suspected of having committed, or intending to commit, criminal offences. These precedents subsequently entered into the discussions leading to the formulation of the Malaysian Constitution prior to *Merdeka* in 1957. For instance, Article 149 of the Malaysian Constitution allows the Parliament to create "special powers against subversion, organised violence and crimes prejudicial to the public and emergency powers" which in effect means that the "fundamental liberties" enshrined in Articles 5, 9, 10 and 13 which relate to the right to liberty of a person, freedom of movement, speech, assembly and association, and the right of property can be suspended if deemed necessary. Preventive detention of individuals is provided for but with certain

limitations as outlined in Article 151.

The *Internal Security Act* (1960) is perhaps the most locally well-known and feared piece of policing legislation in Malaysia that has implications for any kind of overt resistance (see Chapter Four). Essentially, it allows preventive detention of up to 60 days without a formal charge or having to appear before a court for the purpose of interrogation. Subsequent to this period, the Home Minister is empowered to issue a two year detention order or restriction order which may be renewed indefinitely. Whilst the government normally justifies the use of the ISA for preempting a threat to "national security", detractors point to its dubious invocation for detaining a diverse range of people - political leaders and dissidents, trade unionists and workers, religious and social activists, and even immigration officers engaged in an illegal passport racket for migrant workers.

During my fieldwork period, this piece of legislation was once again invoked to detain key leaders of *Darul Arqam*, allegedly for preaching a deviant and militant form of Islam. *Darul Arqam* began as an urban study group in the late 1960s led by Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad, a former government religious teacher and active member of the opposition Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS). By 1973, together with his closest followers, Ustaz Ashaari chose to strike out on his own and began the first of its subsequent widespread network of Islamic villages that practised a self-professed socio-economic model largely independent of the prevailing national development plans. Over the next two decades, the movement subsequently garnered a substantial following of members and sympathisers amongst both urban and rural Muslims as well as establishing overseas branches. An impressive network of farms, schools, *halal* food processing factories, Islamic publications, and cultural activities embodying its philosophy of Islamic "grassroots" development was developed. Initially, the movement - rendered publicly visible by their distinctive Arabic-type dressing - was viewed with a mixture of praise and scepticism by other Islamic teachers and political leaders (Muhammad Syukri Salleh 1992, Nagata 1984: 104ff). By the 1980s, however, there were concerns that the movement was quickly becoming "a state within a state", and theological criticisms by the government-based religious authorities steadily mounted until the nation-wide crackdown amidst rumours of an imminent General Election. Its literature was banned and its property confiscated. After a month into his detention, Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad's pre-taped confession of wrongdoing was broadcast nation-wide over television and radio.⁴⁷ Following this gesture, a series of well-publicised efforts were made to rehabilitate its members to mainstream society.

In October 1987, a similar crackdown was conducted but against a more diverse range of individuals a few months after the Singapore authorities had detained "Marxist Christians" for allegedly plotting to overthrow the government. In the Malaysian context, a stream of high pitched political rhetoric and infighting had prefigured the arrests. Several local and foreign newspapers deemed as overly partisan were also banned. Reminiscent of the ambience of the Emergency period, the government code-named this security endeavour "Operation Lalang", signalling an analogous reference to separating an indigenous wild hardy grass from the other legitimate vegetation of Malaysian society. In the White Paper entitled, "Towards Preserving National Security" released about 5 months later, it was argued that the preemptive action was necessary in the face of mounting racial and religious tensions precipitated by various individuals, political parties and religious groups. A list of these "sensitive issues" was outlined, including amongst others, "the Christianisation of Malays and exploitation of the Christianisation issue", "the manipulation of the Islamic religion", and the "activities of the Marxist group".⁴⁸

Significantly, a strong legal challenge was mounted against the indiscriminate use of the ISA in order to allow the detainees to respond to the substance of the allegations. A coordinated campaign was also launched to garner widespread international attention and support in an effort to secure the unconditional release of the detainees. This was subsequently done but in calculated stages. Various procedural loopholes were exposed by a team of lawyers, jurists and international human rights organisations. However, the authorities also learnt from this episode and various amendments to the ISA were made (in August 1989) disallowing any judicial review (including the writ of *habeas corpus*). With no court being able to exercise any jurisdiction with respect to any act undertaken or decision made by the relevant authorities, the question of compliance with any legal procedural requirement was made redundant.⁴⁹

In the same period, a controversial bill on the *Maintenance of Religious Harmony* was tabled, debated and passed in Singapore. This action was also viewed with considerable concern by some religious leaders in Malaysia as it was feared that a similar intrusive bill would be passed. The bill was introduced after a study commissioned by the Ministry of Community Development. Academicians broadly identified two disturbing trends that had implications for the political stability of Singaporean society. One was the increase in aggressive religious proselytisation by Christians and the other, an apparent heightening of religious political activism. Consequently, one of two central arguments of the bill (the

other being "religious toleration and moderation") underlined the need for religious organisations not "to stray beyond these [educational, social and charitable work] boundaries, for example by venturing into social action". Otherwise, it was argued, the consequences would be dire. "In a multi-religious society, if one group violates this taboo, others will follow suit, and the outcome will be militancy and conflict" (cited in O'Grady 1990:89). Instead of relying on commonsensical everyday practices and social negotiation, a legislative code of conduct was created to keep the domains between the "sacred" and "secular" separate.

Conclusion

One thread that runs through this chapter has been the argument that whilst the *raison d'être* of colonialism is largely tied to an extractive economy, cultural forces animating governance cannot be ignored. The processes of producing culture and colonisation are historically intertwined. Both legalist definitions of land ownership and occupancy as well as bourgeois notions of aesthetically pleasing landscapes are the vehicles par excellence for colonialist projects.

The objectification of the world is engendered by framing coeval relationships and ambivalence in terms of incommensurability, fixity and discrete entities. Through a plethora of writings, natives and recent migrants to British Malaya were imbued with quintessential characteristics and qualities. Their beliefs and practices ("traditions") were fixed and invented through an extended process of selective classification and codification. Census surveys conducted since the nineteenth century bear witness to a progressive contracting and reordering of the diverse origins of peoples to facilitate bureaucratic administration through containment. When these boundaries were breached or contaminated, various normative activities like banishment, policing, and territorial segregation were enacted and exercised. Functionalist and evolutionist ethnological divisions and categories such as "race", tribe, native land, sexual proclivities and religious affiliation buttressed colonial rule but also gave a veneer of legitimacy to later contestations for material resources and political power.

Various brands of Christianity were also regarded as a valuable if sometimes unpredictable and contentious ally to the colonial imperial enterprise. Representing a familiar icon of Western civilisation, sensibility and progress in opposition to various

versions of Islam, Hinduism, and Chinese religions, the energetic activities of missionaries were welcomed. As they worked tirelessly to win souls, build hospitals and schools, they not only Christianised colonial spaces but also helped to reproduce European forms of sensibility. But these relationships were also ambivalent, involving a mixture of collusion, competition and conflict between colonial authorities and missionaries, and between various missionary societies themselves. Whilst some missionaries simply accepted the fact of colonial expansion and tried to put it to their own use, others protested against the idea that they were simply conduits for European culture and indeed regarded it as a threat to their own more important work.

Whilst in British Malaya Christian proselytisation was largely circumscribed because of political expediency, in the aftermath of the political and moral crisis set in motion after the Second World War when anti-colonial forces were ascendant, institutional Christianity became conspicuously conscripted as a mediating agent under the "winning the hearts and minds" policy vis-à-vis atheistic Communists and militant trade unionists. For many missionaries, the risk of being seen as fuelling the imperialist cause in the light of sea changes of nationalism was palpable. But the humanitarian and spiritual opportunities offered by the "new villages" could not be passed over without undermining their integrity. In the postcolonial period, a displacement of power is occurring in the religious field. Whilst in British Malaya, explicitly tampering with Islam was considered a politically destabilising endeavour, and religion was thus discreetly relegated to the realm of personal laws managed by religious advisory and endowment boards, proselytisation activities amongst Malay-Muslims in postcolonial Malaysia is publicly framed as a serious legislative offence and an affront to ethnic sensibilities. In official discourse, these activities constitute a threat to national unity and security. A government-mediated Sunni Islam now occupies a prominent position in the religious and cultural landscape of the country, and indirectly structures and impinges on non-Islamic concerns and discourse.

As will be elaborated in the chapters that follow, I argue that some aspects of the controversies and ambivalences in the postcolonial era continue to bear palpable traces of the historical past or, more to the point, the past as a cultural resource is referred to particularly as they pertain to the notion of "everyday resistance". Fragments of the troubled past are selectively and didactically invoked to remind present nation-state citizens of the fragility of inter-ethnic and inter-religious conviviality, and to keep along well-trodden paths. In the process, a public culture of apoliticalness and self-censorship, as

well as oblique ways of expressing dissent have been engendered. Policy makers, urban planners, politicians, religious leaders, and ordinary people routinely continue to appropriate, deploy or contest a legacy of cultural imageries and political rhetoric in order to constitute their own respective causes and agendas. Additionally, this interplay is further complicated in the present context of a globalising process of cultural fragmentation and homogenisation (Friedman 1994, cf. Hannerz 1992) as well as the emergence of sizeable Malay-Muslim middle and working classes in urban centres as a consequence of the two decades-long affirmative action New Economic Policy (NEP) and the current economic buoyancy in Malaysia.

NOTES

1. See *Welcome to Petaling Jaya* published by the Public Relations Department of the *Majilis Perbandaraan Petaling Jaya* (Petaling Jaya Municipal Council) dated 28 September, 1983. For details on the spatial layout of Petaling Jaya, see McGee and McTaggart 1967.

2. See *Draft Structure Plan for Petaling Jaya & part of Klang District, 1988-2010*.

3. One of the most influential figures during this period, General Templer, is credited with the astute observation that

what this country needs for stability is a middle class. There are rich tycoons and poor peasants. There is a potential middle class, and it's developing fast but it's stuck in the bazaars. We ought to establish a dormitory suburb (cited in Cloake 1985:289).

4. With reference to an analysis of global systemic processes Jonathan Friedman similarly has argued "for a perspective, a frame of reference, from which better to understand both the generality and the specificity of the present (1994:16).

5. For useful overview histories of Malaysia, see Andaya and Andaya 1982, Hua 1983 and Means 1991. See also Gullick 1987, Reid 1988, and Turnbull 1972.

6. In a similar vein, "squatting, as we now understand it, began to appear on official records only since the British colonial period and the incidence of squatting can be said to have come about as a direct result of changes made in the economic system as well as the system of land tenure and land administration by the colonial authorities" (Azizah Kassim 1983:61).

7. Debates on the interplay between colonialism, imperialism and Christian missions in the non-western world during various historical periods are not likely to abate or be amicably resolved. The corpus of literature is vast and ever-increasing with each new theoretical and historiographical perspective. For useful background discussions, see Carpenter and Shenks 1990, Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, David 1985, 1988, Fabella and Torres 1980, Neill

1966, Pieterse 1992, Stanley 1990, Thomas 1994, Walls 1984 and Warren 1965.

Mention should also be made of a recent publication (Hall 1994) that explicates the Victorian literary, social and religious dimensions of "Christian manliness" and "muscular Christianity". This motif not only set agendas for moral and social salvation but also engendered sexist, classist, and imperialist ideological underpinnings.

8. The notion of "gentlemanly capitalism", formulated by PJ Cain and AG Hopkins (1986 & 1987) argues basically that a new perspective on the long-run development of the British economy can be found by focusing on activities that were both profit-oriented and acceptable to those who ranked as gentlemen. The "gentlemanly capitalists" themselves were a complex group which included large landowners, established professional classes and new elements such as the wealthier private bankers and merchant bankers who dominated the Bank of England. These gentlemanly capitalist groups were of particular importance, not only because their wealth often exceeded that of the leading industrialists, but also because gentlemanly occupations conferred a degree of prestige that guaranteed privileged access to political influence and power.

9. Abdul Fatah (1988) contends that Malay practices described by the colonial administrators-scholars with respect to land was by this time an indistinguishable blend of local customs and Islamic law. For example, the notion of *menghidupkan tanah mati* is consonant with the Islamic principle of *Ihya-al-Mawat* whilst the belief that it is the Malay ruler who owns land is substantiated in *Surat al-Ma'idah* 5:17 of the Qu'ran.

10. These practices were categorised as "customary laws" or *adat* which was itself a blend of traditional Malay customs, Islamic inheritance laws and other indigenous influences. *Adat* acquired a technical legal definition in the nineteenth century in British Malaya, British Borneo and Netherlands East Indies to mean "laws for the population of these areas as prescribed in the forms developed by the respective colonial regimes and administered and applied in colonial legal bureaucracies" (Hooker 1972).

11. For a partial history of education in British Malaya, see Loh 1975.

12. See Abdul Fatah bin Haji Khalid (1988) for details of the administration of Islamic land laws in Selangor.

13. See Governor to Colonial Office, Despatch No. 397, dated 24 September 1887 in CO 273/1887.

14. Ibid.

15. For example, see Selangor Secretariat Files [hereafter SSF] 2214/1888, SSF 441/1888, SSF 813/1885, SSF 2828/1887.

16. See Holdish 1899. In 1917, a year after publishing *Political frontiers and boundary making*, he was elected President of the Royal Geographical Society.

17. Arguably, Livingstone was amongst the first to explicitly establish the ideological link between commercial exploitation and moral improvement among the "races". He argued that Christianity was a necessary condition for peaceful commerce and for an effective exploitation of Africa's resources.

18. During its heyday between 1880-1930, the American foreign missionary enterprise

similarly shared an expansionist ethos. In comparison to the British, however, the Americans were more favourably placed to focus their resources on preaching a "world-civilising" Christ because less energies and finances were expended on managing their overseas colonies. The pervasive imagery and watchwords of "an errand to the wilderness" (inherited from the Puritans) and "the evangelisation of the world in this generation" were deployed to animate missionary funding and recruitment (Hutchison 1987).

19. Mackenzie (1984, 1990) has suggested that the high water mark of the missionary movement partly coincided with the propagation of a "British imperial popular cult" as characterised by national rituals, hero-worshipping, a transformation of the Queen into an imperial matriarch, public school athleticism, and the centrality of the military in national life.

20. In a similar vein, Toni Morrison (1990) has suggested that in the literary imagination the notion of "blackness" or a discourse of "Africanism" was essential to the invention of the "white race". By abstracting "blackness" from an imperialist history of degraded and enforced labour, Africans were made to signify uncontrolled vitality and eroticism. For more light-skinned natives of the colonies, their subject positions were reworked into an imitative and infantilised people in need of nurturance and tutelage into the fundamentals of European governance and civilised culture.

21. Amongst other similar kinds of literature in various disciplines, academic geographical publications of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century provided scientific support to the widely-held belief that climate was correlative to the levels of civilisation. Thus, referring to proposals for European settlement in Tropical Africa, John Scott Keltie expressed the fear that "the ultimate result would be a race deprived of all those characteristics which have made Europe what it is" (Keltie 1897:315). In a similar vein, Holdich opined: "The indolent sunloving people of Southern latitudes have everywhere proved more easy to dominate than those who have been nurtured in a colder atmosphere. We can rule the millions of Hindu and Mohamadan agriculturists of the Indian plains with far less violent effort than the thousands in the hills and uplands of the frontier" (Holdich 1916:13f).

22. The Bugis were renowned sailors and warriors who travelled far and wide with their square-rigged, two-masted ships. In the seventeenth century, they were displaced from their homeland by Dutch restrictions and began to settle in the trade ports of peninsular Malaysia.

23. As explicitly noted in an annual report: "What Selangor wants is population, for there are literally thousand of square miles of forest available for the miner and agriculturist" (*Straits Settlement. State of Selangor Annual Report*, 1891). To encourage agriculture and population movements particularly into the "interior" areas, quit rent on agricultural holdings was waived for a period of three years.

24. Missionary work previously confined to the coastal parts of the Straits Settlements could now expand into the hinterland increasingly made more accessible by the growth of the transportation network. The more settled and polyglot population of Chinese and Indians were favourite missionary concerns in comparison to Malays largely because of the perceived restrictive stipulations of the Pangkor Treaty, poor conversion results, and views that religious proselytisation was politically inexpedient and potentially explosive.

25. In 1898, Ebenezer Howard published *Tomorrow. A peaceful path to real reform* (later revised and reissued as *Garden cities of tomorrow* in 1902). He conceived of a satellite town

with a population of 30,000 built at a distance from the parent city. Between the two centres would be a belt of open land used for agriculture. The municipal council would be the owner of land in the satellite town, and its responsibilities would not be confined to preparing urban designs but also in areas of health, social, morals and aesthetics. For Howard, "the town and country must be married, and out of this joyous union will spring new hope, a new life, a new civilisation" (cited in Cherry 1988:68). His book inspired the formation of a *Garden City Association* in 1900, and the publication of its journal, the *Town and Country Planning*.

As early as 1912, the question of a *Town Planning Enactment* for the Federated Malay States was already mooted, only three years after the *Housing, Town Planning, Etc. Act* was passed in England. The beginning of urban planning in British Malaya is officially dated to the arrival of Charles Reade who was an ardent follower of the "garden cities" tradition (Goh 1991:29ff).

26. A number of migrant Indians who arrived to work on the plantations and railways were also Christian converts from well-established mission districts in Tamil Nadu. Many Anglicans, for instance, largely came from the Diocese of Tinnevely where the Church of England had built up sizeable congregations. Although collective recruitment and group migration allowed the possibility of recreating the familiar ambience of an Indian Christian village in British Malaya (e.g., Kampung Padre, Brickfields, Sentul) this was not always possible. Under these circumstances, concern was expressed on the dangers of the Indian Christian "lowering his standard to that of the surrounding non-Christian ideals" since he was more in contact with a largely non-Christian population than the European (Ferguson-Davie 1921:60).

27. Furnivall (1948:304f) characterised the colonial societies created as caste-like

where although there is a medley of peoples, each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. As individuals they meet, but only in the market-place, in buying and selling. There is a plural society, with different sections of the community living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit.

28. Missionary schools were partly funded through grants-in-aid which originated from taxes levied on a thriving opium trade. Although various churches and individual missionaries were vocal in legislating and enforcing laws on public morality (gambling, drinking, prostitution, working on the Sabbath) and delegating the opium trade, their efforts were blunted by this conundrum (Hunt *et al* 1992:34f). For a study of educational policies in British Malaya, see Loh 1975.

29. The legacy of spatial differentiation with various ethnic groups was highlighted in the New Economic Policy, and one of its explicit objectives was to undo this colonialist bind.

30. WGA Ormsby-Gore reported in 1928 that "Malaya has the greatest natural resources amongst colonised countries. In 1926, exports from British Malaya was worth more than all the other British dependencies combined - more than India, Ceylon, Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Uganda, Kenya, Egypt, and Fiji put together. The export value per head of population of British Malaya in 1925-26 was the highest in the world" (Command Paper 3235, p. 21).

31. Gyanendra Pandey (1992) suggests that "communalism" is an orientalist term coined to describe the "otherness" of politics in the "East" but subsequently employed by secular

nationalists to indicate the "illegitimacy" of religious nationalism.

32. Nehru had made an earlier successful tour of Malaysia in May-June 1937 probably on the invitation of the Central Indian Association of Malaya (CIAM) formed about a year earlier. The CIAM was an uneasy alliance of politically-aware professional men, and merchant and Chettiar interests with little representation of the Tamil-educated intelligentsia (Stenson 1980:45f).

33. *Malayan Daily News* dated 19 March, 1946 (cited in Stenson 1980:146). The *Malayan Daily News* was the English edition of *Tamil Nesan* ("Lover of Tamil"), a Tamil newspaper started in 1924 by Narasimma Iyengar.

34. There are numerous studies on "The Emergency" from a variety of perspectives. Amongst others, see Jackson 1991, Short 1975, and Stubbs 1989. Furedi (1994) provides a comparative study of "emergencies" declared in a number of British colonies.

35. PRO CO 537/2193 dated 8 April, 1947 and entitled 'Summary of reports regarding recent disturbances on estates in south Kedah'.

36. The indigenous peoples were originally labelled as Aborigines but a new collective term was coined to counter the MCP's own use of *Orang Asal* ("original peoples").

37. *Malayan Review*, February 1949, p.157.

38. Apart from his obvious influence in shaping the foundations for self-government, his biographer, John Cloake (1985) credits him with revitalising museums, provoking the publication of the first collection of indigenous fairy tales and the teaching of Malaysian history in schools, and the setting up of the national botanical garden ("Templer Park") and the Outward Bound School in Lumut. Mrs Peggie Templer was equally active and is famed for the first Tuberculosis Hospital in Kuala Lumpur, a school for deaf and dumb children in Penang, and the setting up of Women's Institutes all over the country.

39. Indicative of the deep concern with which the "Emergency" was received by British investors and the general public were journalistic books and novels similar to those penned by Vernon Bartlet. Based on an "extensive tour" of Malaya and on the suggestion of General Templer, the expressed purpose of the book was to convince the reader that "the campaign of the bandits, clumsily known as Communist Terrorists, do not represent any kind of Malayan nationalist movement; in the absence of any genuine Malayan loyalty to override the existing racial rivalries between Malay, Chinese and Indians, the progress towards self-government is as swift as is sensible; and Malaya is one of the happiest countries in the world with possibly less colour prejudice than in any other plural society" (Bartlet 1954:12).

Others cautioned on the disjunctive effects that unbridled "Westernisation" might have on the colonies, and the political instability that may ensue as a direct result of a moral malaise. Thus, Hugh Fraser, a Conservative Party Member of Parliament, reported that

The moral question remains of supreme importance. To my mind, Western materialism is in danger of making an unfortunate impact on peoples who, apart from the Chinese, and even some of these are Christians and Buddhists, are still deeply religious. Unless we are careful, the materialism of the West may be shorn of its somewhat specious ethical trappings and sophistries in the minds of the simpler and possibly profounder peoples (PRO CO 1022/22 dated 16 January, 1952).

40. Thus, whilst "new villages" physically created a spatial boundedness, the "propaganda war" involved erecting mental boundaries against the "Communist Terrorists" (CTs). The costs involved were considerable. Millions of pounds sterling were expended in making propaganda films (e.g., "Operation Malaya"), air dropping leaflets on "safe conduct" over the jungle canopy, monetary rewards for information, and so forth.

41. Templer listed 15 criteria to gauge whether or not a "new village" could be considered as properly settled. Amongst them were "a place or places of worship, trees along the main streets and round the *padang* and school, roads of passable standards with side drains, and reasonable conditions of sanitation and public health (Short 1975:404).

42. Letter from Sir Gerald Templer to the Chairman of the Conference of British Missionary Societies, 25th February, 1952. Microfiche, STM Archives (cited in Northcott 1992:59).

43. In 1949, the Colonial Social Science Research Council was formed with a Sub-Committee on Anthropology and Sociology. Research conducted on varied aspects of social and political life in the colonies extended beyond academic interest as suggested in a letter by Edmund Leach to the Secretary of the Council on the progress of one of his students.

The apparent emphasis on Religion may possibly incline some members of the Council to think that this work is not adequately "practical". This appearance is deceptive. I am satisfied that Freeman has been maintaining the practical side of his economic and political studies with great thoroughness. But it is precisely because the exact relation between the political and economic organisation and the very rich body of "religious" material is still unclear that the extension of this research period is important...Both from the point of view of "pure anthropology" and from the view of the Sarawak Government I feel that it is highly desirable that the requisite finance for an extension on the lines indicated be obtained...(PRO: CO 901/22 dated 12 July, 1950).

In a similar vein, a proposal submitted in 1952 to examine differences in visual perception among various ethnic groups in Malaya evoked the following comment by the Director-General of Information Services in Malaya: "her research might well provide information that would be of value to the department in the practical design of propaganda posters" (PRO: CO 901/24 dated 21 October, 1952).

44. As tellingly observed by Kathleen Carpenter:-

For the first time, it was possible to reach these people, who had formerly been inaccessible, scattered as they were in small groups throughout the jungle. It was felt that in this, their hour of need, the villagers might be especially open to the message of God's care and love for each individual, and that the challenge of the claim of God on their lives might prove to them a greater challenge than that of Communism (Carpenter 1955:18).

45. Following a well-trodden path of "missionary romance" publications (e.g., Lambert 1912), the frontier-like circumstances of the "new villages" presented a similar rich fodder for works like McIntosh (1956) and Carpenter (1955). Written for the consumption of the general Christian public in the United Kingdom, this genre contains a mixture of factual background, broad generalisations about ethnic groups and other religions in British Malaya, personal drama, and a challenge for the continual propagation of Christianity in the "Far East".

46. It has been suggested that the increasing popularity of Thaipusam particularly in the urban centres can be partly explained in terms of a de-linking with a religious festival which was locked into a hierarchy that no longer seemed immutable during the post-war period (see Collins 1991).

47. For *Darul Arqam's* view, refer to 'Sect leader sees political paranoia as base for harassment', *Aliran Monthly* 1994; 14(8).

48. See Appendix 2 of Das 1989. Since the 1985 *coup d'état* of President Marcos in the Philippines when churches were able to mobilise huge crowds onto the streets, various governments have arguably placed the church and other religious groups under closer scrutiny and policing.

49. For more details of the incident, see Das 1989 and *The Rule of Law and Human Rights in Malaysia and Singapore* 1989.

Chapter Two

URBAN UTOPIAS:

Squatting and postcolonial urban culture

In the previous chapter, I sketched some of the key historical moments that frame the postcolonial Malaysian landscape. Before turning specifically to my fieldwork site, what I propose to do in this chapter is to narrow the focus of discussion further to the contemporary significance of "squatter colonies" in juxtaposition to emergent urban processes. This is to advance further the argument that space cannot be conceived merely as a neutral and empty container of social, economic and political activities. More to the point, I follow Lefebvre's lead (1991) in viewing space as the domain in which episodes of hegemonic expansion and the capitalist drama are played out (see also Castells 1983, Harvey 1989a, King 1990). It is the spatialisation of modernity and the strategic planning of everyday life that has allowed capitalism to survive, and to reproduce successfully its essential relations of production. Lefebvre's notion of the "production of space" - space as a social and political product, and space as a product that one buys and sells - extends the notion that commodification, so basic to the reproduction of the capitalist order, has now incorporated the organisation of the urban built environment.¹ This domain in turn engenders various moral landscapes where social actors position themselves to have control over the production and organisation of space.

This chapter also argues that discourse on squatting has both themes of continuity and discontinuity. Basically, I suggest that whilst "squatter colonies" have a long chequered history ever since the colonial era, it is only in recent years that they become particularly salient as a result of a kind of developmentalist discourse. Squatters and squatting allow a nationalist notion of "development" to be charted and made more thinkable together with other marks of modernity like high-rise office building, vehicle highways, communication networks and prestige structures. "Squatter colonies" are rendered, in Foucault's terms (1986), "heterotopias of deviation" - sites where behaviour and meaning are deemed deviant in relation to a mean or norm. Whilst they are made to signify "absences" and places of "deprivation" needing redress in official discourse, this does not necessarily accord with actual lived experiences. Moreover, the analogy of "the city" in certain kinds of urban planning to a social body in which poverty, disease or social deviance are deemed as unavoidable malfunctions is more the effect of representational strategies that gloss over

social and economic inequalities. A rational view of space, of the city as "concept" needs to be distinguished from the contradictory "fact" of the city, and of space that is experienced in everyday life (de Certeau 1984).²

The changing faces of "the squatter problem"

"Shanty towns", "spontaneous dwellings", and "squatter colonies" are established topics in the prevailing literature on Third World cities and urbanisation. As elsewhere, these discussions are framed and animated by contending theoretical and ideological persuasions (cf. Armstrong and McGee 1985). For instance, proponents of variant forms of the "modernisation" thesis generally regard the emergence of modern cities as an improvement over indigenous cities. However, the dramatic demographic growth and problems characteristic of Third World cities is evaluated as a "pseudo-urbanisation" arising from an imperfect replication of the tertiarisation of the industrial First World. In contrast, adherents of the "dependency" approach portray Third World urbanisation as integrally linked to the transnational expansion and logic of modern capitalism. The ills of urban poverty and housing are manifestations of the uneven distribution of resources and surplus accumulation not merely confined to the Third World but also found in the most affluent of First World cities.

In the specific case of peninsular Malaysia, it was shown in the previous chapter how a combination of liberal immigration policies, land policies, transportation, and an extractive economy had facilitated the genesis of new urban centres whilst eclipsing others.³ Moreover, whilst the exigencies of "The Emergency" provided the immediate context for a bold experimentation in social engineering, an enduring imprint has been a spatial and ideological boundedness between ethnic groups. The combined effect of these disparate yet interlocking forces was to engender an ethnoscape where there is a social and economic divide between non-Malay urban dwellers and Malay rural *kampung* residents. However, since the 1970s this legacy has been systematically unyoked mainly through the possibilities opened up by the New Economic Policy (NEP).⁴ Ethnic Malays are particularly encouraged by the government to "modernise" by gravitating to the urban centres and thus dissolve the ethnic spatial divide. Preferential quotas in education, commercial, and civil service opportunities have all helped to catalyse this rural-urban drift. Moreover, the explicit turn towards an industrialisation programme and the setting up of public enterprises by the government have substantially increased Malay participation in the

urban wage sector.

A significant majority of these migrants usually resorted to "self-help" housing when they arrived in towns and cities.⁵ The increasing visibility of "squatter colonies" in turn attracted a series of official studies, reports and academic research.⁶ Routinely, it is announced that the state of Selangor and particularly the Klang Valley (encompassing Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya) attracts the majority of incoming migrants. Consequently, this region has the highest concentration of squatter colonies in the country.⁷

Official discourse on squatters has generally oscillated between assigning them to pathological and patronage categories. In the late 1960s, a report prepared on behalf of the *Ministry of Local Government and Housing* aptly summed up the contemporary dominant posture. "Squatter colonies" were characterised as "seedbeds for thugs, secret societies and other racketeers...". To allow "squatting" to continue unchecked

challenges the status of government as agencies for maintaining law and order; results in an increase in crime, juvenile delinquency and a wide variety of social problems, loss of substantial revenues to the government; affects the physical development of Kuala Lumpur, its economic, social and political stability; inhibits economic growth and investment; and reduces its image both home and overseas (Sen 1969:2).

Newspaper accounts of the period described government officials and politicians underscoring the position that squatting activities would not be condoned, and that the legal rights of landowners over squatters would be upheld. The *National Land Code* (1965)⁸ was cited as incontrovertible evidence that squatting is a criminal activity, and the legislation of the *Squatter Clearance Act* 1969 provided additional leverage for eviction exercises. Squatter colonies were frequently described in terms of negative identities - as "eye-sores", "death-traps", places of "squalor", fire-hazards, and a nest for criminals. It was also insisted that the provision of essential amenities to certain colonies was necessary on humanitarian grounds and to curb the outbreak of diseases. Squatters who resisted eviction were "law-breakers".

Whilst urban managerial strategies initially placed an emphasis on eviction and demolition, especially for those colonies situated in commercially strategic areas, this drastic mode of action was subsequently diluted. A persistent public outcry, the advent of the NEP in the wake of the May 13 "ethnic riots", and the interventions of the World Bank's

developmental philosophy of the day were some of the motivating factors. Beginning in 1971, budgetary allocations and targets for low-cost housing were set out in the Five-Year National Development Plans (see Appendix 1). However, detractors (e.g., Khor 1989) have pointed out that the public sector's achievement of these targets has been consistently low whilst the private sector has concentrated on constructing medium-priced and high-priced houses to the detriment of the urban poor. Because of the lack of financing facilities, a section of the squatter population has complained that they could not even afford the cheapest low-cost house priced at 25,000 *ringgit*. Moreover, it has been argued that the "poor housing conditions" of the settlements were not due to the inability to build good houses but more because of the absence of security in land tenure.

A "sites and services" programme (advocated by the World Bank and a number of local NGOs) was also put in place. Housing lots were offered to entice squatters away from the city centre. But it was subsequently reported that the results were not as satisfactory as expected due to inadequate implementation, a lack of enthusiasm by local authorities as well as the reluctance of "squatters" to be relocated elsewhere. What was recurrent in the squatters' hierarchy of needs was the request for the provision of free basic amenities (piped water, electricity, garbage disposal, sanitation) to their settlements. This was a constant refrain to visiting politicians.

For administrators, the phenomenon of widespread squatting and the growing Malay ethnic make-up of squatters⁹ raises the unsettling spectre of discontent at the *status quo*. Apart from humanitarian considerations, the possibility that these deprived conditions could become political breeding grounds for subversive and anti-national sentiments has informed official discourse. Subsequently, the posture of city authorities perceptibly shifted with the realisation that "squatter activities could not be stopped, [as long as] they were unable to provide sufficient public housing for the urban poor" (Azizah 1994:31).

In response to the Prime Minister's call for a more comprehensive study of the "squatter problem", a "squatter policy" was eventually spelled out in 1978. This multi-faceted strategy combined various mechanisms for monitoring and controlling squatter activities as well as recommended intervention programmes for improving the quality of life in the settlements. The overall objective was to reduce the numbers of squatters by incremental resettlement as well as a containment of their spatial expansion. The tenor of these recommendations was echoed in the *Kuala Lumpur Draft Structure Plan* published in

1984. At a policy level, squatters began to be portrayed in a more positive light. They were no longer "undesirable illegal occupants" but people that needed assistance in purchasing legal housing. A "squatter register" to distinguish "genuine" squatters from "professional squatters", squatter landlords and petty investors was set up.¹⁰ To ensure that squatter houses and even small settlements did not materialise overnight in the capital city, an enforcement unit was formed to patrol and keep a close surveillance on the growth of *rumah kilat* ("lightning houses") and to remove any unauthorised repairs and extensions to dwellings. Many squatters have subsequently spilled outside the Kuala Lumpur city limits to escape detection and reprisals. At the same time, basic amenities like communal water stand pipes were made increasingly available to a larger network of settlements but at a fee.

Various individuals and voluntary organisations have also ventured to provide some relief to what they saw as unacceptable human living conditions. One of the more well-publicised ventures was the Sang Kanchil Project sponsored by UNICEF in conjunction with the United Nations International Year of the Child in 1979. The project was implemented in 13 different *kampung* in and around Kuala Lumpur, and focused on maternal and child health care, pre-school education, and income-generating activities. However, projects like these were localised and not far-reaching.

"Squatter colonies" are heterogeneous entities. In some cases, they are thriving "urban villages" whilst in others they approximate the archetypal images of chaotic shantytowns and slums. These differences, I would argue, partly stem from the nature and extent of political patronage that has been consciously cultivated. For instance, in more established Malay settlements with a significant political vote-bank it would not be unusual to witness the whole range of basic amenities as well as kindergartens, meeting halls, and postal and telephone services. Some of the houses built are also comparatively more elaborate. In these cases, residents have largely assumed the facticity of election promises given by politicians a generation ago that they be eventually given legal tenure. Subsequently, substantial efforts and finance have been incrementally spent on refurbishing and extending their houses. In other cases, Temporary Occupation Licences (TOLs) issued more as a monitoring measure have also unintentionally emboldened many to embark on investing in permanent structures. With acquired prosperity and in keeping with their upwardly mobile status, subsequent generations of Malay squatters have opted out of a *kampung* lifestyle in favour of modern housing. But many have also chosen to remain in their cloistered locality, a veritable oasis in the concrete jungle of the city. Significantly, the

commonly cited aversion to resettlement into flats is expressed as fears of the demise of a *kampung* spirit, and of being separated from kin, friends and neighbours as well as being moved inconveniently away from the residents' current places of work and schools. Politicians, in turn, have been prone to say that squatters must be willing to adjust to the realities of urban life and to make way for "development" and "progress".

As alluded to, the political fortunes of aspiring politicians are also tied up to these localities. If not actively mediating with the local authorities or procuring various benefits for the residents, they have to be seen at least as articulating and defending their interests. Although their plight could be championed by a host of political parties and voluntary groups, it is more often the case that electoral support is given to the incumbent politician (or ruling party) who is seen as able to secure concrete gains to the settlement. In some Malay settlements, this recognised practice of patronage has evolved to take cognisance of the exigencies of urban political currents. Settlements are frequently subdivided into a number of smaller wards in order to have a larger voting base for the biennial UMNO nation-wide elections as well as to increase their chances of small projects funding applications (Azizah 1994:46).¹¹

Since the mid-1980s, however, I would argue that there have been significant shifts and the transformation of this culture of patronage is tied with the introduction of new kinds of economic and social processes promoted by the state. Not long after taking office, the Mahathir administration announced that the Malaysian government would henceforth be committed to initiatives that would accelerate growth and increase efficiency in the country. These initiatives mirrored to a certain extent the changed ideological climate in the American and British contexts as epitomised by both the Reagan and Thatcher administrations respectively. The "Malaysia Incorporated" and "Look East" concepts were the first to be introduced but gradually faded out of the development discourse. Nevertheless, central to both was the underlying notion that the country is to be viewed as a corporate entity in which the government provided the enabling environment in terms of infrastructure, deregulation and liberalisation but where the private sector assumed a major role in stimulating growth. Countries like Japan and Korea were initially looked to for valuable leads. In 1985, the Economic Planning Unit of the Prime Minister's Department issued its *Guidelines for Privatisation* which remained the centrepiece for privatisation initiatives up to 1991. Claiming success for the economic changes that occurred in the intervening period, the government subsequently announced the *Privatisation Master plan*

(PMP) in February 1991 which would provide the framework for the expansion and acceleration of the pace of privatisation well into the next century. A unifying catch phrase that was coined by the Prime Minister to epitomise the *telos* of these processes was "Vision 2020" - the year in which Malaysia would have reached the coveted "developed" nation-state status (see Appendices 2 and 3).¹²

Privatisation¹³ policies have given rise to a development discourse which increases the moral responsibility of providing an affordable roof-over-the-voter's-head on the shoulders of the private sector. In some cases, government agencies like the *Selangor State Economic Development Corporation* have adopted a "reverse privatisation programme" where they collaborate with the private sector in developing "state land". As the housing market shifts from direct control to a government sponsorship of free market provisions, it is likely that consumption cleavages and social re stratification will emerge along the lines of privatised and collectivised modes of consumption noted in other contexts (e.g., Saunders 1986). A significant marker towards this trend were the amendments made to the *Land Acquisition Act* (in 1991) and the cancellation of *Malay Reservation Land* in selected parts of Selangor. The most controversial amendment provided powers to the state allowing private property to be compulsorily acquired for any use that is deemed to be economically beneficial to the country's development. Detractors argued that this was a disturbing change to the past when such acquisitions were confined to "public purpose" or to "public utility" only. The amended section had the loophole of allowing acquired land to be later disposed of to an individual or a company for their own use. Other amendments rendered seeking legal recourse against such acquisitions redundant. In the heated debates before the amendments were passed in Parliament, various high-ranking politicians argued that these amendments were necessary as "factories cannot be built on trees" and that more land was required for the benefit of housing the "landless *rakyat*". Again, detractors point out that it is the consistently poor showing toward providing affordable housing that constitutes the main problem (see Appendix 1). Between 1955 and 1990, government and private sectors have achieved only 50 percent and 30 percent respectively of the total of low-cost housing targets.

Recent government efforts to rectify this have included guidelines which stipulate that schemes must set aside 30 percent for low-cost houses with a ceiling tag of 25,000 *ringgit*. Whilst larger developments are generally able to accommodate this requirement without a substantial reduction in profits, smaller developers generally view this as an

unrealistic and troublesome imposition. With a growing middle-class consumer market, the current incentive is to venture into medium and high priced houses and apartments.¹⁴ Consumer watch groups have reported numerous smaller developers building one short of the minimum number of houses so as to avoid having to set aside 30 percent of their scheme for low-cost housing.¹⁵ Even when these units are built, they are not necessarily well-received as there is not much choice in the matter. The quality of building materials, compact floor space (typically 500 square feet), and the prospect of climbing stairs are often areas of complaints especially for bigger families. In everyday conversation, "pigeon-holes" and "chicken-coops" are popular epithets used to describe these dwelling structures.¹⁶

Notwithstanding these grievances, the current demand for affordable housing is unrelenting. For opportunists, this is a welcome space for profiteering. Low-cost units supposedly reserved for the "poor" are sold at above the ceiling prices through "under counter" payments. At the *kampung* level, unscrupulous local leaders are provided with the opportunities for both financial and political gain. Allegations that these leaders act in concert with various government officials and developers in keeping residents uninformed or diverting low-cost units entitled to them are not uncommon. At the same time, there is also a thriving alternative real estate market for squatter houses. Depending on the specific locality, type of structures, and the kind of amenities available, prices in and around Kuala Lumpur currently range from 3,000 *ringgit* to 10,000 *ringgit*.¹⁷ If there are rumours that a particular locality is earmarked for development, there is stiff competition to obtain a foothold in the *kampung* in anticipation of being allocated a low-cost housing unit.

Living in a congested squatter *kampung* has many well-publicised hazards. Perhaps the most traumatic is the threat of destruction of their homes either through natural causes or human intervention.¹⁸ Newspapers frequently report fires razing whole settlements within minutes because of the combustible wooden houses constructed almost back-to-back. Putative causes range from unextinguished cigarette butts, spilled over kerosene cookers and oil lamps, and mosquito coils. But when the site is earmarked for redevelopment by housing developers and the residents are reluctant to move, allegations of arson arise.

Squatter evictions have notably intensified with the announcement of transforming Kuala Lumpur into a "squatter-free city" by the year 2000. In and around Kuala Lumpur, numerous "squatter colonies" have been demolished to make way for shopping complexes,

condominiums, golf courses, the Light-Rail Transit, and so forth. During the construction period, squatters are typically housed in interim lodgings called *rumah panjang* ("long houses"). Whilst ideally they should be sited close to the residents' original abode or place of work, there are also numerous cases where relocation has meant being transplanted several miles away to unfamiliar surroundings. Although intended to be a stop-gap measure, these spartan and barrack-like structures have become, in numerous instances, homes for thousands of people for a decade (or even more) when projects have been delayed or abandoned.

At the same time, the "squatter problem" has assumed acute proportions in the past decade with Malaysia's buoyant economy drawing in waves of migrants to the Klang Valley. A recent report estimated that in 1992 about 13 percent of the 2.9 million people (377,000) living in the Valley were squatters, and that this figure would expand with about 20,000 in-migration expected annually (Azizah 1994:100). At the Selangor State Assembly held in December 1994, a state executive councillor claimed that out of one million squatters in the country, 250,000 are found in Selangor alone.¹⁹ Closer to my research site of the Petaling District - one of the 4 districts in Selangor covering an area of 187 square miles - about 40,000 squatters were reported in 1995.²⁰ Suburban Petaling Jaya is not exempt as well. Out of a total 12,000 squatters in the township, about 9,000 are concentrated in PJS alone.²¹ Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and independent researchers, however, have expressed doubt about the facticity of these figures, alleging them to be underestimated for political expediency. For instance, *Jawatankuasa Sokongan Peneroka Bandar (JSPB)*, a NGO involved in advocating "squatter rights", has contended that in comparison to the government's official figure of 400,000 squatters in the Klang Valley, 1.5 million would be more realistic.

A magnet for many of the migrant workers has been the construction industry.²² Since the mid-1980s, there has been an acute labour shortage which was accentuated by the outflow of about 200,000 skilled Malaysian construction workers to Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan for better wages. In their place, waves of predominantly male workers from Indonesia, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar have arrived willing to take on low-skilled, dangerous and difficult tasks now shunned by locals for lower salaries. Latest estimates indicate that up to 80 percent of the construction labour is now constituted by foreign workers.²³ Migrants are also documented as being involved in a range of other occupations ranging from plantation and factory labour, petrol pump

attendants to street vending, night-club entertainers and domestic help. Official figures released for December 1993 indicated the presence of about 1.05 million legally-hired foreign workers in the job market with several thousands more estimated for those who are wary about registering themselves with the authorities.²⁴

Whilst some employers do provide temporary lodgings for migrant workers, they are presently not legally compelled to do so. Because the state governments are hard pressed to meet low-cost housing quotas for locals, migrant workers are left to fend for themselves. To save as much money as possible, many have resorted to erecting their own abodes on the margins of squatter *kampung* or share rented accommodation. Illegal migrant workers are especially susceptible to exploitative labour and to coping with spartan living conditions because of their fear of being discovered and deported by the authorities. Their large inflow has also engendered local fears, and migrant workers are frequently perceived in negative terms. Even though most migrant workers are Muslims by faith, their ambivalent status as a cultural "other" is given prominence. In the media, migrant workers are alleged to be the primary cause for the increase in urban crime, murders as well as the repository of diseases (typhoid, malaria, tuberculosis and AIDs). Similarly, social tensions have arisen with reports of increasing numbers of Bangladeshi migrant workers courting and marrying local Malay women.²⁵

"Squatting" and the global ecumene

In an early formulation put forward by Robert Redfield and Milton Singer (1954), a distinction was made between cities that engendered "orthogenetic" and "heterogenetic" cultural transformations. "Orthogenetic cities" are associated with earlier forms of urbanism which were primarily ceremonial and literate centres that progressively refined "little traditions" into more sophisticated "great traditions". In contrast, "heterogenetic cities" are akin to present-day administrative and business cities which are prone to transform old cultures and traditions. A more detailed elaboration of what "orthogenesis" entailed was provided by Tambiah (1977). He examined the cosmological blueprints that informed the spatial ordering of a number of ancient cities and states in Southeast Asia. To characterise the existence of a mandala-like controlling core surrounded by outer layers of influence, he coined the phrase, "the galactic polity". Tambiah's engaging study of Buddhist Thailand where there is a centripetal, homogeneous and concrete manifestation of power resonates with Benedict Anderson's (1990) own explication of the cosmology that underpinned

contemporary political cultures in Muslim Java.

These studies essentially suggest that Southeast Asian precolonial urbanism has elitist spatial elaborations of status, prestige and power. A controlling centre had structured and graded society and spaces according to a classificatory and hierarchical grid. However, since the advent of the colonial era the logic of a globalised industrial capitalism has also engendered new spatial templates over this earlier grid. Nevertheless, the cultural idiom of urban rule continues to depend substantially for its legitimation on the deployment of ideas that originate from "outside" the locus of everyday life (cf. O'Connor 1995, Reid 1988). The reimagination of the public culture of a postcolonial nation-state not only appropriates modernist ideas and practices but it also feeds on precolonial legacies of patronage. For instance, in contrast to royal courts conferring status, extracting tributes, and claiming allegiance and loyalty, the modern state bureaucracy has largely assumed this function. Amongst others, it creates a large pool of public sector jobs, provides an infrastructure for investment opportunities, and elaborates on a nationalist culture that is predominantly globalist and cosmopolitan in tenor.

This chapter has outlined how the Lefebvrian "production of space" has relevance for understanding how "squatter colonies" are spatially embedded in urban landscapes. In further appreciating the significance of the interplay between local and supra local cultural processes, I wish to suggest that Hannerz's notion of creolisation (1992) is particularly useful. Creolisation reintroduces a qualified emphasis of the process of "orthogenesis" for the modern-day metropolis in the global landscape, and takes a theoretical position that is situated between two poles of globalisation. Proponents of "cultural synchronisation" hold that present-day centre-periphery relationships will eventually lead to the disappearance of cultural differences. The scenario painted is that of a cultural homogenisation mediated by the expansionist logic of an economic and cultural world-system. Modernisation theory is a variant of this approach that implicitly masks cultural imperialism. At the other pole are arguments that depict a contrary position. Rather than modernisation acting as a universal solvent of cultures, it is the expansion of core economies and metropolitan political influence that paradoxically promotes cultural heterogeneity. The keen contest over culture in the peripheral areas thus indexes the ideological turmoil that is engendered in the wake of global expansion.

Hannerz, in comparison, argues for a more nuanced understanding of

asymmetrical cultural flows that include both national and transnational circuits. The state cultural apparatus of Third World nations whilst endeavouring to tie their "national cultures" more closely to the global ecumene by using the same organisational forms and technology as the centre also partake of setting up their own asymmetrical centre-periphery distinctions. In other words, there is a distributionist view of culture in contrast to culture regarded as a mere repository of meanings (1992:15). Akin to the development of creole languages, he likens this creative interplay between the cultures of the "centre" and the "periphery" as a process of "creolisation". Whilst recognising the asymmetrically structured nature of these exchanges, this framework nevertheless allows for "the periphery to talk back" as it creates new cultural commodities in a global market.

Malaysia is currently awash with an unprecedented accumulation of wealth made possible through a buoyant economy. In keeping with this particular moment of capital flow, a notable recent government preoccupation has been the resignifying of old colonial spaces with new insignias of cultural autonomy and nationhood. Urban life is particularly conducive for the mobilisation of the spectacle and it is the capital city, the "centre" of the postcolonial nation-state, which assumes the palpable site for cultural innovation and the fostering of nationalist pride and status.²⁶ Prestige building projects act as visible and tangible markers contributing to the invention and management of a boundable nationalist culture in the context of a global stage. Political authority and the right to rule is further euphemised through the idioms of moral relations and metaphoric kinship in official discourse and print capitalism. Malaysians are exhorted to adhere to traditional Asian values, uphold racial harmony and religious tolerance, be loyal to national ethnic leaders, and be grateful for the economic prosperity of the country.²⁷ To reach the coveted "developed" status by the year 2020, a regime of religious morals, business ethics, and of thrift and hard work has been commended as necessary ballasts against an excessively materialistic and individualistic Western-type society. At the same time, Malaysia is portrayed in tourist brochures as a cultural market-place, recognisable to both locals and foreigners.

I suggest that it is this particular phase of the cultural conversion of wealth into the built environment inscribed with nationalist aspirations which has thrown up formidable challenges for both the ruling government and "squatters". The current wave of squatter eviction, large-scale construction, and infrastructural upgrading is rendered more poignant as the first-ever Commonwealth Games to be held in a "Third World" country is scheduled

to be in Malaysia in 1998. That "squatter colonies" in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya occupy a high symbolic ground in the political landscape is eloquently indexed by the constant flow of contesting discourses. For many disillusioned *kampung* residents, verbal promises made by previous generations of politicians have evaporated in the heat of development. It is alleged that the local authorities and MPs are more in league with private developers than concerned to safeguard and protect the interests of the ordinary electorate (e.g., Mohd Nasir Hashim 1994). For opposition political parties, these "colonies" provide strategic fodder for criticisms of governmental rhetoric and priorities. For voluntary and religious organisations, the comparatively sub-standard living conditions of these "colonies" are convenient sites for turning their respective models of social redemption into partial reality. The government has not been negligent as well. A few months before the 1995 General Election, various housing and social upliftment projects aimed at the "hard-core poor" were launched and the welfare obligations of the government towards the ordinary *rakyat* widely disseminated through the media.²⁸ To appropriate a well-known anthropological dictum, "squatter colonies" on all counts are "good to think with".

NOTES

1. Elsewhere, he elaborates (1991:350);

Capitalism does not consolidate itself solely by consolidating its hold on the land, or solely by incorporating history's precapitalist formations. It also makes use of all the available abstractions, all available forms, and even the juridical and legal fiction of ownership of things apparently inaccessible to privative appropriation (private property): nature, the earth, life energies, desires and needs. Spatial planning, which uses space as a multipurpose tool, has shown itself to be extremely effective. Such an instrumental use of space, is surely implicit in the 'conservative modernisation' that has been introduced with varying degrees of success in many countries.

2. For this chapter, besides relying on secondary literature I have referred extensively to newspaper cuttings.

3. An "urban" area is defined as having a population of 10,000 people and above.

4. The NEP is a watershed programme formulated in the wake of the "ethnic riots" in May 1969. For two decades (1971-90), it shaped economic and social planning. The expressed objectives were "to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty, by raising income levels and increasing employment opportunities for all Malaysians irrespective of race...[and] to correct economic imbalance so as to reduce and eventually eliminate the identification of

race with economic function".

A *laissez-faire* capitalist development gave way to a state interventionist posture in selected sectors which essentially aimed at creating a parallel group of a Malay middle class. Consequently, the new ethnic category of *bumiputras* ("sons of the soil") - which groups together Malays, the Orang Asli, and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak - were favoured through state subsidies, scholarships, job quotas, licensing regulations, and a whole range of affirmative preferences. By the end of the NEP, it was reported that *bumiputras* owned 20.3 percent (short of the 30 percent target) of all corporate equity in comparison to 2.4 percent in 1970. In comparison, the "Chinese" share of the equity rose slightly to 44.4 percent whilst the "foreigners" share dropped spectacularly from 63.3 percent to 25.2 percent. Meanwhile, the "Indians" share dropped from 2 percent to 1.5 percent. Also significant is that the share of "nominee companies" increased from 2 percent to 8.4 percent (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 27 June, 1991). For critical discussions of the NEP, see Gomez 1994, Jesudason 1990, Jomo 1993, 1995.

When the NEP expired, a "New Development Policy" (NDP) was launched in 1991. In comparison to the NEP, the NDP is couched in more accommodating tones. Ethnic quotas will progressively give way to the development of management and entrepreneurial skills amongst the *bumiputras*. Moreover, there is an explicit reliance on the contribution of private investments (local and foreign) and entrepreneurship as the driving force for the growth of the Gross Domestic Product. Although manufacturing and tourism will be significant sectors, the productivity of the agricultural sector will also be enhanced by the amalgamation of smallholdings into plantations, and the extensive use of mechanical and other labour-saving devices.

5. Scholars like Abrams, Manglin, and Turner have argued against the "culture of poverty" thesis by suggesting that the growth of denigrated shantytowns is in fact sensible and rational housing behaviour undertaken by the poor as a base to seek their way out of poverty. For a fuller discussion, see Gilbert and Gugler 1992.

6. See Azizah 1994 for a succinct summary of these studies and an up-to-date treatment of squatting practices in Kuala Lumpur.

7. In 1973, about 25 percent of the Kuala Lumpur conurbation was reported as being made up of "squatter families"; in 1980, the figure rose to 40 percent or 400,000 persons (see 'Land for the poor', *The Star*, 3 January, 1984).

8. More specifically, "no title to state land shall be acquired by possession, unlawful occupation or occupation under any licence for any period whatsoever". This clause supersedes the principle of "adverse possession" which permitted a squatter to seek a legal claim to the land if he had occupied it for a number of years, and if the legal owner had done nothing to exert his rights during this period.

9. The Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) research bureau, for instance, remarked that "the squatter problem is fast becoming a 'Malay' problem" (cited in Azizah 1994:65).

10. In some cases, it was alleged that certain government employees had purchased squatter houses on land earmarked for development in order to be eligible for low-cost houses (see 'Report those rich squatters', *Malay Mail*, 4 December, 1986).

11. This is indicated by the use of suffixes to the parent *kampung*. For example, local political branches would be each entitled for Kampung A *tambahan*, Kampung A *baru*, and

so forth.

12. For contrasting discussions of the "privatisation" process in Malaysia, see Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid 1993 and Jomo 1995.

13. Privatisation in Malaysia has a number of connotations. They include a partial or full divestiture of state-owned enterprises, the leasing out of activities normally associated with the public sector (e.g., television broadcasting) and the contracting out of social services.

14. For instance, the *Property Market Report* for 1993 (released by the Valuation and Property Services Department of the Ministry of Finance) recorded an increase of nine percent for houses situated in the Petaling District alone in popular middle-class areas such as Petaling Jaya, Subang Jaya and UEP-Subang Jaya. In one particular housing area, property prices almost doubled within three years for similar units built by the same developer and at developer prices.

15. In March 1995, the MPPJ announced that all new housing projects must make provisions for low-cost housing, and that *Certificates of Fitness* will not be issued to housing developers until all the projected low-cost houses are completed ('MPPJ: All projects to have low-cost housing', *The Star*, 27 March, 1995).

16. Current low-cost housing flats have two bedrooms in addition to a living-dining area, a compact kitchen, and a tiny bathroom-toilet. Of late, local government authorities have begun to acknowledge how confined spaces - what John Turner has called "oppressive housing" (cited in Gilbert and Gugler 1992) in another context - can lead many youths in large families to spend most of their time "loafing around" in supermarkets and public areas ('Squatters getting bolder', *The Malay Mail*, 10 December, 1994).

17. See 'The alternative real estate', *The Sun*, 27 & 28 October, 1994.

18. For personalised accounts of forced eviction, refer to: 'They said my house is "illegal" and they demolished it', *Aliran Monthly* 1992:12(10); 'Residents defend their land from KTM', *Aliran Monthly* 1995:15(1); and to various copies of the *Suara Peneroka Bandar* newsletters.

19. Moreover, he added that about 5,700 squatter homes belong to foreign workers alone, reflecting the presence of some 27,000 illegal immigrants in the state of Selangor (See '250,000 squatters found in Selangor', *The Star*, 10 December, 1994).

20. See 'Petaling to resettle 40,000 squatters', *The Star*, 25 February, 1995.

21. 'Houses for squatters in PJS', *The Star*, 1 May, 1995

22. A member of the newly established Construction Development Board projected that the construction industry will grow at an average rate of 12 percent annually until the year 2000 and taper to about 10 percent until the year 2020 ('Construction industry set for strong long-term growth', *New Straits Times*, 3 March, 1995). Standard Chartered Securities compiled a list of the country's 31 largest announced projects due for completion between 1992 and 2020, and the total cost is a massive 163 billion ringgit (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 28 September, 1995).

23. 'Give and take', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 25 May 1995.

24. See 'Working hard to send money home' in *New Straits Times*, 24 May, 1994. The most numerous arrivals are from Indonesia (about 220,000) followed by Bangladeshis (about 68,000). The high demand for migrant labour coupled with the relative lack of labour representation for them has led to various abuses. For instance, a number of employers and recruiting agencies have resorted to withholding their passports and travel documents which is illegal under *The Passport Act*. Despite efforts by the authorities to encourage all immigrants to register themselves and be provided with a *bona-fide* three-year travel document - *Surat Perjalanan Laksana Pasport* (SPLP) - and work permit, many thousands have stayed away.

The Police Field Force Central Brigade is responsible for periodically rounding up illegal immigrants. Code-named *Ops Nyah* (literally, "Get Rid Operation") two major crackdowns have been conducted thus far. In their raids, between 800 to 1,000 forged SPLPs were uncovered. The Immigration Department reported detaining nearly 50,000 foreigners in 1994 for various offences ranging from illegal entry, overstaying and failing to follow conditions in the passes (see 'Nearly 50,000 foreigners held for various offences last year', *New Straits Times*, 6 March, 1995).

25. See 'Government gets tough on migrant labour', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 31 October, 1996.

26. For instance, politicians and city planners take pride in billing Kuala Lumpur the "Garden City of Lights" and as having the highest twin tower building and flagpole in the world.

27. For example, see 'Anwar: Uphold tolerance to ensure survival', *The Star*, 26 September, 1994; 'Dr Mahathir: Be grateful for prosperity', *New Sunday Times*, 25 December, 1994; 'Place duty to God and religion first says DPM', *New Straits Times*, 3 January, 1995; 'Racial unity key to success', *The Malay Mail*, 25 January, 1995.

28. See amongst others, 'Anwar: Give low-cost housing priority', *New Straits Times*, 13 September, 1994; '25,000 low-cost homes passed', *The Star*, 29 November, 1994; 'Big increase in low-cost housing', *New Straits Times*, 3 January, 1995.

Chapter Three

EVERYDAY BRICOLAGE:

Squatter spaces and routines

One of the central tenets of "common sense", according to Geertz (1983:90f), is to affirm the "immediate deliverance of experiences" and to deny it as an "organised body of considered thought". Unlike formal doctrines, axiomised theories, or architectonic dogmas, common sense wisdom is "unshamelessly and unapologetically *ad hoc*" and circulates via jokes, anecdotes, proverbs, epigrams, incidental remarks and the like. And yet, it represents the world as a familiar world, "one everyone can, and should, recognise, and within which everyone stands, or should, on his own feet".

Similarly, Giddens (1984) has suggested that through their everyday interactions with people and objects individuals develop certain kinds of knowledge - conscious, subconscious and ideological. Their subsequent actions based on these kinds of knowledge reproduce a social structure that also displays the connectedness of social phenomena in space. Bourdieu (1990), in comparison, has theorised the production of a common sense world in terms of a harmonising of both practical sense and objectified meaning. For him, the apparent objectivity of the situation is constructed by a mastery of a code that is characteristic of their social conditions of production - "the practices of the members of the same group or, in a differentiated society, the same class, are always more and better harmonized than the agents know or wish" (Ibid.:59). These dispositions in turn tend to protect themselves from crises and critical challenges by investing in a milieu that is relatively constant, and "choices" are in effect avoidance and coping strategies albeit of a

non-conscious, unwilled avoidance, whether it results automatically from the conditions of existence (e.g., spatial segregation) or has been produced by a strategic intention (e.g., avoidance of 'bad company' or 'unsuitable books') originating from adults themselves formed in the same conditions (Ibid.:61).

By contrast, de Certeau (1984) has argued that the everyday practices of people (e.g., moving about, talking, shopping etc.) have a "tactical" quality in comparison to the "strategic" labours of more powerful entities like a proprietor, an enterprise, a city and so forth. Whilst a "tactic" is characteristically meandering, not obeying the law of the place, is constantly looking out for opportunities to seize, and manipulating events in order to turn

them into opportunities, a "strategy" involves creating places in conformity with abstract models and rules of operation. "Strategies are able to produce, tabulate, and impose these spaces, when those operations take place, whereas tactics can only use, manipulate, and divert these spaces" (Ibid.:30). Or stated differently, tactics are counter-practices aimed at neutralising the homogenising effects of social institutions, and are attempts to infuse spaces with qualities conducive to individual desires.

To represent textually the poly-textured features of these activities, however, is easier espoused than done. In this chapter, I describe everyday routines and rhythms, and the varied use of spaces in Kampung Nehru as well as the immediate locality. By attending to these mainly non-verbalised details some of the ideologically significant aspects embedded in the locality are highlighted. To do this, I adopt the strategy of writing up "a typical day" in Kampung Nehru. Although a temporal snapshot as a slice of fluid time is admittedly partial and relatively reductionist, it has certain advantages as a heuristic device. By hanging around it a collage of residents' "voices" as well as juxtaposing various extraneous social forces that constitute the domain of Kampung Nehru, I hope to make ethnographically accessible both the nature of human relationships and the prevailing *habitus* in the locality. In this portrayal, I do not, of course, exhaust the lives of and the meanings that the men, women and children of Kampung Nehru have constructed for themselves, and my ethnographic description and analysis is necessarily fragmentary, incomplete and indeterminate.

A labyrinth of daily routines

Administratively, Kampung Nehru falls within the jurisdiction of the Majilis Perbandaran Petaling Jaya (Petaling Jaya Municipal Council). More specifically, it is in a locale known as "PJS" (Petaling Jaya Selatan or South Petaling Jaya).¹ In reality, Kampung Nehru is hardly a hermetically sealed settlement let alone an idyllic urban "village". People and ideas criss-cross easily between administrative boundaries. Nevertheless, enveloped by other similar "villages" and embedded within the ever-expanding web of the capital city of Kuala Lumpur, it is marked by a variegated array of attempts at maintaining the semblance of meaning, order, stability and cohesion. At the most localised and personal level this is reflected in compromises and negotiations necessitated by the contingency of daily urban living, and punctuated periodically by more corporate levels of symbolic activity.

To "outsiders", the spectre of clearly bounded and cohesive communities as mediated through various visible signs might appear persuasive indeed. But as suggested by Cohen (1985:21ff, see also Barth 1969), this outlook might be more a feature of questionable evolutionist and positivist ideas and myths propagated in the early part of this century rather than in grounded ethnographic reality. An interpretative approach, in contrast, would consider the malleability of symbols used, and carefully distinguish between form and content. Local communities, thus whilst exhibiting a commonality of form (ways of behaving) might, on further investigation, reveal a variety of imputed meanings (content). The thesis that members of a community are engaged in a symbolic construction of boundaries necessarily implies both spatial and temporal considerations. Indian residents of Kampung Nehru in constructing and negotiating the boundaries of their existence, beliefs and practices cannot but be informed (albeit incompletely or imperfectly) by the historical experiences of their forebears as related through a combination of oral and written sources, and selectively buttressed by political and social rhetoric. Nevertheless, the inertia of *habitus* (in Bourdieu's terms) as mediated through both official and non-formal networks is also open to the imprints of emerging configurations of power and prestige.

My lasting impression of Kampung Nehru and the surrounding *kampung* is that they are densely packed with movement and activities - a seemingly ceaseless daily ebb and flow - throughout the day and night. Except for a few hours of lull, some *kedai makan* (eating shops) remain open up to the late hours of the night and recommence business once again at early dawn in keeping with the shift work schedules of factory workers. Many housewives too are already awake from their slumber to perform their daily domestic routines. Ratna, for instance, rises from bed just before 6 am to prepare food for her husband and their school-going daughter. Only after they are off to their respective destinations does she then perform her *puja*. Others, like Letchumi who works in a Multi-National Corporation (MNC) factory nearby would have to wake up even earlier for their chores before heading for their morning shifts that begin at 7 am. Alternatively, some prefer to cook food the night before to save some time. In some cases, the cycle is inverted. Sarala, for instance, prefers to work in the night shift that begins at 7pm (until 7 am) in order to allow her to spend more time with her children and do her household chores. For those who are unmarried or who can afford the extra expenditure, a simple but substantial breakfast can be purchased cheaply from a few vendors selling packeted sustenance like *nasi lemak* or *roti chanai* at various nodal points of the locality. A favoured spot for street vendors is along Jalan Besar where an open air market is sited later in the morning.

Spiritual sustenance is not neglected either. With the aid of powerful amplifiers and loud speakers, the cool morning air is filled with the sonorous *azan subuh* originating from the local mosque. Identical calls from the many *surau* located in the surrounding settlements further away are also audible, and the resulting prolonged reverberation gives an overall surreal effect. Slightly later, peals from the Hindu temple bell in Kampung Nehru announce that the first *puja* of the day is being performed by the resident *pujari*.

Under the bluish grey drape of early morning skies, Jalan Besar becomes momentarily inundated with a human traffic of multi-coloured uniformed women and men. Conversations are rare as they walk briskly and purposively towards their places of work - the plentiful factories situated within a one-mile radius in the locality. Many also board a horde of blue-coloured buses lined up along the highway. Functioning as a temporary elongated parking lot, these *bas kilang* (factory bus) enable a mass exodus of workers to factories which might be situated as far as 50-60 kilometres away. This highly visible mass movement of people, oscillating in both directions of Jalan Besar, is regularly repeated throughout the whole day as workers return from (or head for) work according to their respective shift times.²

Factories are distinct sites in a network of institutions created by the dictates of industrial capitalism. With productivity and profitability as their *raison d'être*, factory uniforms³ constitute a component of a whole arsenal of management techniques aimed at maintaining a regime of uniformity, bodily discipline and group morale.⁴ This is particularly striking in the electronic factories owned by MNCs. Uniforms act in concert with other discursive and bodily practices - the raising of the company flag, singing of patriotic songs, recitation of mission statements, compulsory callisthenics, family outings, fashion shows, prizes and citations for group excellence, and quality control circles (QCCs) - in attempting to colonise and remould the worker's notions of space, temporality and rhythm towards a *habitus* of predictability.⁵ The hierarchical logic of factory uniforms also have segregating side-effects which spill over into public spaces. At the open air morning market within the settlement and the "working class" air-conditioned supermarket adjacent to the Free Trade Zone (FTZ), for instance, it was extremely rare to witness factory workers exchanging greetings and conversing with others in differently coloured uniforms. Instead, they bunch together in identically coloured or in same sex clusters. Partly, this could be easily explained in terms of a lack of familiarity with one another but this phenomena also illustrates the power of clothing as a non-verbal language of signs in reconstituting social

relations and sociality. Although the banal point that attitudes and behaviour of persons are strait-jacketed by uniforms is to be resisted, factory uniforms can still be usefully read as a metonym of the organisational logic of the industrial work place. They reflect eloquently the rites and "public script" (Scott 1990) of management to create and maintain an imagined community of convivial workers employed in safe and clean working environments. Additionally, the imaginations of workers are repetitively irrigated with the notion that they are not merely producing material goods but that their labours are also integral to sustaining the current robust economy, and of propelling the nation towards the coveted "developed" status by the year 2020 (see Appendices 2 and 3). The symbolic capital of their contributions is given much play, and their cohesiveness as a metaphorical family is linked with the modernising trajectory and economic fortunes of the nation-state.

Currently, the electronics industry is the largest private sector employer in Malaysia. The recruiting, employment and production strategies of MNCs, particularly in the electronics industry, have been the subject of a number of academic studies in the past.⁶ Young women between the ages of 18-25 years are preferably employed especially in low-skilled, dextrous, and repetitive shopfloor work. These women are frequently recruited from rural areas. Larger companies (particularly Japanese companies) provide housing in the form of hostels or rented shophouses.⁷ If these workers are renting their own accommodation, up to four or five women can choose to share a room that can cost up to 200 *ringgit* per month (Chee 1994:35). Shift work is ubiquitous with some larger factories employing three or four shifts for a day. Workers are required to be rotated around these shifts every few weeks. In many large factories, the turnover rate is high and in any one year retrenchment and recruitment exercises are common occurrences. Additionally, senior workers are offered attractive monetary benefits as inducements to retire voluntarily. The rapid turnover is to keep wages at a competitive edge as well as to mitigate disruptive anti-management activities by factory workers. Trade union activities are frowned upon by the management and there have been numerous cases where workers associated with unions have been dismissed or retrenched.⁸

Despite these disadvantages, MNC factories are popularly desired first-stop destinations for "the girls" - female school-leavers with between 11 to 13 years of formal education, especially those who are unable to find employment with the more favoured government and service sectors. Amongst workers, an informal ranking system exists with regards to these MNCs. In the locality of PJ, companies like Motorola and Epson are

viewed as particularly prestigious companies as they imply comparatively higher wage rates, more fringe benefits, and comfortable working conditions. Because of their distinctively designed uniforms, employees of these companies were readily visible, and were sometimes spoken of with thinly veiled envy in my snatched conversations with other factory workers in the *kedai makan* or *pasar malam*.

In Kampung Nehru, Letchumi is one of the privileged individuals who has a long liaison with these companies. She speculated that her good fortune for the last 15 years can be partly attributed to her consistently satisfactory performance in reaching quotas within acceptable levels of spoilt electronic components. But years of routine and various organisational changes to further enhance productivity have engendered a feeling of jadedness for Letchumi. "The factory used to be more relaxed before and I could not wait to go to work. I enjoyed learning new things and meeting friends. Now there is a lot of pressure and I have to work more quickly". Moreover, with her advancing age she is finding the rotating shift-hours to be increasingly a strain to her physical well-being and family life. Although Letchumi lamented not changing earlier to an office job when she had the chance, she conceded that the additional income derived from shift work has allowed a better standard of living for her small family of four. Letchumi herself often used the phrase "middle class" to denote her household's present economic and social status in comparison to other residents in the *kampung*.

Working long, tedious and disciplined hours in these factories exacts a toll on human sociality. Often when viewing the daily human traffic of returning factory workers, I was struck by an air of lethargic silence enveloping them. These scenes contrasted sharply with boisterous schoolboys exchanging friendly heckles with one another. Parvati is a case in point echoing the circumstances of many young female Indian factory workers in the settlements. In her mid-20s, unmarried and frail-looking, she is employed in one of the lesser known foreign-owned electronic processing factories. Parvati left her small home town in the neighbouring state of Perak a few years ago to seek better job prospects in the capital city. Ratna (her elder sister) and Krishan offered her an abode in their 2-bedroom house in Kampung Nehru. Occasionally, when our paths crossed in the evenings she seemed exhausted and withdrawn. Nearing the end of fieldwork one evening she suggested to me the overriding reason for her condition. Her basic take-home pay is 400 *ringgit* and because she wants to save up as much money as possible for future personal undertakings as well as the eventuality of a marriage dowry, she does as much overtime

work as possible. Parvati works an additional 4 hours on top of her 8 hours to earn an extra 10 *ringgit* each day. Frequently, to take advantage of the double wage rate offered by the management, she works on Sundays as well. As an "attendant", she is paid a further 15 *ringgit* extra. In total, her take-home pay averages just under 800 *ringgit* per month. After deducting for expenses, like contributions to food and a token rent, a sizeable proportion of her salary is mailed home to her parents. The remaining balance constitutes her personal savings. Parvati realises that her present employment in the factory cannot be taken for granted. She is thus motivated to make the best of her present prospects. At the same time because of the nature of detailed microscopic work assigned to her she admits that her "social life" has suffered - "all I want to do is go home and sleep everyday". Temple festivities and the occasional factory social gatherings are the only brief respites from her daily work routine.

Activity along Jalan Besar perceptibly intensifies even as the rising sun warms the cool morning air. The road is now flooded with noisy and fuming hordes of cars, vans, and bright pink coloured mini-buses jam-packed with passengers heading towards Kuala Lumpur. Being the only form of public transportation for the settlements, these buses enjoy a brisk and roaring business. A popular commuting myth characterises minibus drivers as notorious for their cavalier attitude towards road etiquette. Because of their smaller sizes and greater speeds compared to normal buses, they are able to race down highways and stretches of roads, often forcing their passengers to sway violently as they sharply negotiate bends or overtake other vehicles. The task of keeping one's balance becomes more tricky for the standing passenger, particularly more so when the buses are cramped with people. Uncomfortable and awkward as these circumstances are, they are seized with relish by some passengers for anonymous sexual encounters. During these jolty rides, women sometimes complain of various parts of their anatomy being pinched, groped or caressed. Even conservative and traditional dressing fails to act as deterrents in these encounters.

From around 7 am onwards, the vista at Jalan Besar quickly changes once again. A few of the food vendors would have moved on to other sites elsewhere or even for their regular jobs. Their vacated places are, however, quickly reoccupied by the vendors of the open air morning market. Tents, tarpaulins, folding tables and umbrellas are the basic props for a melange of wares offered for consumption - supplies of meat and vegetables, clothing and footwear, cosmetics, costume jewellery, kitchenware, electrical goods, traditional medicines, and religious paraphernalia. The potpourri of smells, fumes, jostling

crowds, passing vehicles and inviting sing song-like calls of street vendors lend an atmosphere of festivity. Whilst women form the bulk of the customers that converge at the market, most vendors are men. These morning markets have at least a dual function. They not only bring to the residents fresh supplies of meat and vegetables at relatively uninflated prices because of low overheads but they also widen the range of consumer choices for residents in addition to the numerous grocery shops situated along Jalan Besar. Many of the street traders have operated in this locality for numerous years. Some reside in the settlements as well. Years of local familiarity have also made possible the pragmatic advantage of credit facilities being extended by some grocery shop owners to regular customers, a practice noticeably absent in larger shops and modern supermarkets.

There is an eclectic feast for both the visual and olfactory senses as the vivid and variegated colours are conjoined by a soup of aromas - of the racy smell of a range of fresh and sea-water creatures, of unmistakable pungent curry spices, of the fragrance of sweet fruits and moist vegetables. However, a more pervasive and peculiar odour hovers over the settlements as well. Emanating from the beer manufacturing factory nearby, the concoction of fermented barley and malt is compounded further by chemical by-products discharged into Sungei Penchala. But the immediate olfactory domain around the market is particularly dominated by the putrid stench of rotting organic matter as adjacent to the stalls is a mound of exposed rubbish. Since the rubbish is cleared by a lorry only once or twice weekly, clouds of flies hovering over foraging cows or goats are an ubiquitous sight. This scene is repeated in numerous sites in the settlements as there are similar but smaller open dumps scattered throughout. Although household refuse is sealed in plastic bags, the combination of tropical weather and foraging animals exposes their contents after a short while. Not surprisingly, doctors in the local clinics frequently treat children and adults afflicted by dysentery and skin infections. For those living along the riverbanks or adjacent to the *tasik* (lake), their refuse is conveniently thrown into these watery dumps. But once again, the ecological consequences are merely displaced. In the evenings, the *tasik* is a favoured fishing spot. When the water level is low enough, children frequently frolic in the river.

By around 9 am, all of the remaining shops along Jalan Besar would have removed their shutters for business. Whilst less voluminous than before, the flow of vehicular traffic never stops entirely. Drivers though have to slow down at the site of the morning market because of the milling crowd of people and foraging cows. The din of traffic and of myriad

conversations is periodically joined by extraordinarily loud music emanating from the loudspeakers of passing minibuses. Indeed, sounds and smells combine to give various sections of Jalan Besar a discernible sub-identity. For instance, near to the southern end where most metalwork and motorcycle repair shops are situated, the roar of revving engines, the clash of pounding metal, and the smouldering metallic smell of welding irons occupy the same airspace with syncopated Tamil music and the pungent aroma of curries. At the opposite end of Jalan Besar, where the morning market is sited, human voices and organic aromas predominate.

As mid-morning approaches, the cool air becomes considerably warmer and more humid. Meanwhile, commercial activity slows down and the crowds thin quickly. By 11 am, most of the stalls would have packed up for the day, leaving behind plastic bags and soiled newspapers as traces of their brief sojourn. Shortly afterwards, employees of a private contractor hired by the street vendors would clean up the debris. For the rest of the day, the newly vacated places are re-occupied by a small coterie of drink, fruit and sweetcake vendors. There is a short lull until just after mid-day when the roads are briefly flooded with boisterous children returning home from the three schools in the locality. Thereafter, the scorching afternoon sun keeps most people away from the streets, and the *kampung* is enveloped by a languid calm. Except for the vendors and shopkeepers, this is the time to refrain from strenuous activities.

Ratna visits the market three or four times a week for her groceries. The basic diet for her household revolves around chicken, goat, and fresh vegetables and legumes. On Tuesdays and Fridays, however, she cooks only vegetarian meals as part of their religious observances. Daily, she does most of her domestic chores in the later part of the morning - preparing the day's meal, doing the laundry, mending clothes and so forth - whilst her afternoons are relatively freer. The radio is her constant companion and Ratna tunes in regularly to Radio 6, the Tamil channel of the government-owned radio and television station, to listen to songs, soap operas and news bulletins.⁹ On Thursdays and Saturdays afternoons, she watches the Tamil movies that are screened weekly over television. Frequently, she visits Mani, another housewife staying a stone's throw away from her home when she desires human company. Before she got married, Ratna had been employed on the shopfloor of a fluorescent lamp-making factory in Perak. Whilst the work was difficult (*susah*) she found the experiences of earning some money of her own and socialising with people at the workplace memorable. Although the extra income would come in handy and

she would like to be less confined to the domestic sphere, Ratna explained that it would be inappropriate to seek employment or start a small business until her two children are slightly older and could look after themselves. Without relatives in the locality to help out, there was hardly any option for the time being.

As evening approaches, Jalan Besar swells with people and throbs with activity once again. Helmetless motorcyclists and bicycle riders criss-cross the roads seemingly at random. The recognisable smell of exhaust fumes impregnates the air around Jalan Besar. Many residents, running last minute errands to purchase small items and spices needed for the night's cooking, visit the nearby sundry shops and stop perhaps briefly to exchange news or for a short chit-chat with the shopkeepers. In the motorcycle-bicycle shops, mechanics and their young boy apprentices have their hands full with a constant flow of customers impatiently wanting punctured tyres to be mended, chains replaced, lubricating oils refilled, and bolts tightened.

Fraternising and recreational activities in the locality have a discernible pattern that can loosely be differentiated along ethnic, gender and age contours. For a number of young women and men, the two public telephone booths situated in front of the motorcycle shop are significant places. Daily, two queues of predominantly young Malay women wait patiently for their turn to make or receive calls. Given their illegal status, it would be unusual for squatter houses to have private telephone lines installed. Instead, the numerous public telephone booths that dot the *kampung* are important lines of communication and sociality beyond the geographical confines of the locality. At pre-arranged times and with the foreknowledge of the telephone numbers of selected public booths elsewhere, residents in other *kampung* and beyond could be reached for conversations. In comparison, a few self-employed businessmen in the *kampung* found it financially viable to invest in beepers and older handphone models.

Away from Jalan Besar and in the cloistered *kampung* spaces, housewives and female teenagers are busy sweeping the footpaths and compound immediately surrounding their homes. The small heaps of dry debris accumulated later become miniature bonfires. Younger children are relieved of these duties and they frolic with other neighbouring children. The only sizeable children's public playground is sited along the southern end of Jalan Besar but they are frequented more by those who are slightly older and more mobile (possessing bicycles) because of the distance. Amongst the younger ones there are few

differentiated spheres of play but this becomes more apparent for those above 7 or 8 years of age. For pubescent females, games are played within a circumscribed space close to their homes. In contrast, boys freely comb selected parts of the surrounding terrain, using them as a backdrop for adventure and exploration.

In particular, the *tasik* (lake) is a popular gathering place for fishing but it is a recreational activity more favoured by Malay men and boys (see Plate 8). The *tasik* was originally worked by a floating tin dredge (*kapal*) which was subsequently drained to allow further tin extraction by high pressured jets of water. According to Ravi, a long-standing resident, the pit must have been at least 150 metres deep when work ceased some two decades earlier. After tin mining was abandoned, rainwater had incrementally filled the pit up to its present level and a thriving floating vegetation now blankets nearly half of its water surface giving the semblance of an ancient and serene lake. Because of its depth, Ravi claimed that there are sightings of fishes the "size of a man's thigh" although catching them has been illusive so far. Fishing is not solely for recreation but for household consumption as well. Bigger catches are frequently sold at the *pasar malam* for additional income.

Sepak takraw is an acrobatic team game that is popular with young Malay men as well. It is played on specially-built cement courts found in front of the local UMNO branch offices and community halls scattered throughout the settlements. In comparison, football is less ethnically marked, and is patronised by both Indian and Malay men and teenagers. However, players are still spatially segregated from one another as they play on different fields and on any available piece of spacious sandy areas scattered throughout the settlements.¹⁰

Closer to dinner time, the numerous *kedai makan* along Jalan Besar become inundated with customers. Even as food is consumed, the *azan isha* is broadcast and in Kampung Nehru the temple bell peals for *puja*. The *kedai makan* is almost exclusively a male enclave. For a woman customer visiting these shops, the recurrent practice would be to have her food ordered and packaged to be consumed in the privacy of her room rather than in a public place even though she might be in a company of other women. It would be only male-escorted women that would have their meals leisurely in the shops. Because of the large number of *kedai makan* in the vicinity, competition is stiff and various kinds of innovations were made to entice customers. Thus, the interior decor was enhanced through the use of plastic table covers, flower vases, brightly painted walls, candlesticks, and multi-

coloured fluorescent lamps. This contrasted sharply with the few Indian-owned *kedai makan* which have a comparatively sparse and functional ambience. Only a couple of Malay *kedai makan* abstained from these marketing strategies, and their walls were simply adorned with framed verses from the Qur'an.

Nonetheless, in all the *kedai makan* the television set positioned strategically on a high perch is ubiquitous. Acting as electronic windows for accessing to the wider world beyond the *kampung* as well as vehicles for attracting potential customers, they are switched on almost the entire day. Soap operas and news items are favourite viewing programmes. Given the nature of their clientele, a large spectrum of the programmes selected was along vernacular lines but a few smaller Malay *kedai makan* were not adverse to viewing the daily Chinese soap operas series (subtitled in Malay) as well. A large proportion of screening time throughout the day is devoted to a constant diet of American wrestling videos that are repeated every few days. On festive holidays, depending on the ethnic make-up of their clientele, videos of Indonesian or Tamil movies would be played to attract more customers. Worldwide coverage of sporting events are perhaps the most popular viewing item. During the World Cup soccer competition held in mid-1994, a number of *kedai makan* remained open until the early hours of morning for almost a month to take advantage of live telecasts from various venues in the USA. Throughout the day, all television and radio programmes in Malaysia are periodically interrupted by the *azan*. A brief recital of the appropriate passages from the Qur'an is followed with a Malay translation. During the Islamic month of Ramadan, a daily televised event in the evenings was the breaking of fast performed by important political dignitaries like the Prime Minister. Whilst some customers present in the *kedai makan* would pause to listen attentively to the utterances during these sacred moments, there were also just as many who continued their conversations unperturbed.

Throughout the year a moderately sized open-air *pasar malam* (night market) operates at the southern end of Jalan Besar. Previously, the *pasar malam* was much smaller, and used to be sited at the other end of Jalan Besar. But as the number of stalls expanded, the *pasar malam* was eventually transferred to its present site by the local authorities to mitigate congestion and noise pollution. Kuala Lumpur, Petaling Jaya and the surrounding suburban areas are served by a network of *pasar malam*. Most of the street traders are itinerant, and for each day of the week their stalls are set up at one of numerous possible sites. This long-established marketing practice predates the milieu of modern-day

emporiums, supermarkets and hypermarkets. Except for a constant discourse and surveillance on the health aspects of food vendors, local authorities are generally not adverse to this "informal economy" as a sizeable income is derived from street trading through the collection of site rentals and licensing fees.

The *pasar malam* offer a wide range of everyday consumer items at relatively cheaper prices. Vendors that I spoke to believe that part of the popularity of the *pasar malam* is because customers have the option of haggling to reduce prices even further, a feature completely absent in modern supermarkets and shopping complexes. The latter are viewed as uncomfortable places which the young, wealthy and status-conscious people patronise. In contrast, at the local *pasar malam* there are the advantages of accessibility, informality, and a sense of the festive. Often people come casually dressed (e.g., in shorts and T-shirts). With garlands of lightbulbs strung along the stalls, an eclectic mingling of Tamil and Malay songs from competing stalls, a soup of aromas, and jostling crowds, the local *pasar malam* certainly exudes a carnivalesque atmosphere. The frequency of the *pasar malam* (thrice a week) indicated that there was a significantly large and keen clientele in the vicinity patronising these stalls. Except for rainy nights, which were more frequent during the monsoon season, the *pasar malam* was constantly abuzz with activity. On pay-days and on public holidays, the crowds would thicken considerably.

As in the morning market, some of the vendors were "part-timers" using their evenings to generate supplementary incomes. Because they have regular office jobs in the public or private sectors, their evening business normally involved selling items which required a low capital outlay. This ranged from selling an assortment of pre-packaged snacks (e.g., roasted peanuts and biscuits) to home-cooked delicacies like traditional sweet cakes and spicy noodles. In some cases, profits surpassed their monthly salaries because of the size of the clientele and the nature of the items sold. For the last 7 years, for instance, Samy has worked as a peon for a newspaper company by day, and together with his wife sells an assortment of trinkets, belts and costume jewellery by night. He characterised the neighbourhood as particularly ideal for street vending as it was close to the "middle class" modern housing area and to numerous squatter settlements. Through years of vending, he had developed the street wisdom that "Malay women generally do not like to shop in big complexes" and preferred the ambience of the *pasar malam*. Moreover, being strategically sited in an UMNO political stronghold, the *pasar malam* has few surveillance problems - "there are are no hassles with the local authorities unlike some other places". Because his

profits are consistently good, Samy has been contemplating switching to full-time street-trading. For now, however, he is content with having the best of both worlds.

Other vendors - particularly those managed by housewives - have more pressing daily concerns. Profits derived from their sales go towards the upkeep of their children's education, household expenses and personal savings. Two elderly women from Kampung Nehru, for instance, set up small mobile roadside stalls for a few hours each evening. Situated near to the entrance that leads into the *kampung* and slightly away from the other larger more permanent stalls, one sells modest quantities of home-made Indian bread (*chapati* and *roti chanai*) whilst the other, a few vases of carnations and necklaces of jasmine petals.

Even when night darkness has once again blanketed the *kampung* and the flow of vehicles and people is much thinner, the visible activities along Jalan Besar never entirely cease. Late at night, returning uniformed factory workers momentarily flood the main road once again. Except for a few *kedai makan* and video rental shops, most other shopkeepers would have put up their shutters. Occasionally, a few metal welding shops would remain open until close to midnight. Young men with motorcycles congregate at their favourite open-air spots or *kedai makan* to carouse the night away.

For many others, however, homes are now the foci for a host of domestic activities not least of which is parenting. Ratna explained that she makes it a habit of questioning her daughter about her activities because of the "bad people" (*orang jahat*) that seem to be prevalent not only in the vicinity but in the school environment as well. By mapping who she associates with, Ratna hopes to preempt any negative influences on her daughter. Ideally, she would have liked Krishna to perform his parental duty more conscientiously. "Since he often comes back late at night from his work I have to do it by myself", lamented Ratna. This dilemma became apparent in one of the evenings that I visited Kampung Nehru. I had hoped to speak to Krishna about the Mariyamman *kovil* but as he had not yet returned home, I had a rare opportunity to converse with Ratna instead. Eventually, when he did walk through the front door, Krishna made great play of seeing their infant boy after a long day's work as if to placate Ratna and to impress the unexpected visitor of the intimacy of their family. Krishna subsequently gave me a detailed explanation of his responsibilities as a senior administrative staff of a Chinese-owned manufacturing company which frequently requires him to be away in another town or to entertain clients

late into the night.

Their daughter's education is also given careful attention. Four times a week, she is privately tutored in Tamil, English and Mathematics by another resident, a secondary school student. Although residents understood the importance of education for upward mobility, most of the children and teenagers that I spoke to did not aspire to tertiary education.¹¹ In the past, only a handful of individuals from Kampung Nehru have managed to reach this privileged position given the disadvantaged circumstances under which these children live and study. More commonly, boys and girls alike hope to have enough educational qualifications (between 9 to 11 years of public schooling) to join the labour force as soon as possible. In fact, a number of secondary schoolchildren that I spoke to were already involved in various kinds of part-time waged labour (e.g., helping their parents in street trading, working in factories during the weekends and school holidays, or providing tuition for a fee) to ease their family financial burden and to earn some extra pocket money for themselves.

Segmented spaces

Residing outside the *kampung* in a middle-class neighbourhood nearby had its unintended lesson of providing stark juxtapositions each time I entered and left Kampung Nehru. In the former, many of the larger, well-endowed houses were protected with high metal gates and brick walls. Prominently displayed security alarm boxes, garden spotlights, and "beware of dog" signboards spoke of the affluence within. The service roads lined with large shady trees and manicured flowering shrubs enveloped the neighbourhood with an ambience of serenity. In Kampung Nehru, my initial impressions are recorded as one of familiar bewilderment. The melange of sights, smells and sounds was immediately reminiscent of my prior experiences of providing tuition assistance to children in another Indian squatter settlement in Kuala Lumpur some years earlier. But the context was also different as now I viewed this settlement with a repertoire of newly learnt theoretical lenses.

Like many Malaysians subjected to the currents of the dominant social and political discourse, I tended to see "ethnicity" and "religion" more readily than "class" dimensions. What seemed particularly prominent in the vicinity were the visible markers of ethnic segregation. For instance, there is a plethora of well-maintained *kampung* signboards along

and off Jalan Besar. The logo of UMNO, the dominant political party in the ruling *Barisan Nasional* (National Front), publicises simultaneously the phenomenological existence and political affiliations of Kampung Pinang, Kampung Pinang Jaya and Kampung Berjaya Tambahan amongst others. In contrast, such signs are conspicuously absent or muted in the predominantly Indian settlements of Kampung Keretapi, Kampung Murugan, Kampung Punjabi and Kampung Nehru. These designations are only revealed through queries or if one is able to decipher the Tamil script etched on the walls of local Hindu temples. This suggested to me a different cluster of priorities or ranking in terms of the definition of Indian communities vis-à-vis the Malay settlements.

Senior residents maintain that Kampung Nehru once covered a much wider area and was reputedly the largest Indian settlement in Malaysia in the not-too-distant past. In the early stages of fieldwork a person whom I reasoned should be knowledgeable in this particular respect was Ravi. When I first spoke to Ravi he was still the *ketua* and MIC local chairman for Kampung Nehru. Part of his many functions, as it turned out, included gauging the number of potential voters and supporters for the ruling coalition during the General Elections as well as ascertaining with the developers the number of eligible households for compensation. Ravi had himself stayed in the *kampung* for nearly 30 years and reckoned that before the influx of Malays there were as many as 800 Indian households in the locality. Presently, the numbers have fallen to less than half. A study conducted in the early 1980s indicated a population of 2,000 persons spread over 346 households, of whom about 90 percent were of South Indian origin.¹² Over the years, forced resettlement and voluntary migration have decimated and dispersed its original numbers. In private conversations, a few Indian residents suggested that these radical demographic changes are politically motivated in order to create a large Malay vote bank in various important suburban areas. With visible signs of the proposed redevelopment project in progress, many realised that the fate of Kampung Nehru as a spatial reality is sealed.¹³

Kampung Nehru consists of two spatial portions straddling Jalan Besar. The western (and larger) portion of Kampung Nehru nestles the Mariyamman *kovil* which, as an obvious focal point of both religious and community life, became an important site of my research. To the west and south of its invisible boundaries lie Kampung Pinang which comprises mainly Malay residents whilst the other half of Kampung Nehru adjoins another predominantly Indian settlement (Kampung Murugan) and an extensive "modern" residential estate, Taman Berjaya.

Jalan Besar can be conveniently viewed as a divide juxtaposing the "developed"/"new" and "undeveloped"/"old" faces of the local landscape. Whilst the environment to the eastern side of this thoroughfare reflects the imprints of town planning with geometrically patterned "modern" housing and roads, its mirror image on the other side is seemingly untouched by formal and centralised planning. However, this duality is a recent intervention. Until the 1980s, the "developed" side was a sprawling Malay squatter settlement known as Kampung Berjaya. Its beginnings can be traced to the early 1960s with the majority of the founding settlers consisting of former army servicemen. The name of the settlement was provided by the head of the divisional land office when it was officially recognised in 1967. Throughout the 1970s, the settlement grew rapidly with the massive influx of rural Malays. Soon, Kampung Berjaya Luar and Kampung Berjaya Tambahan sprang into existence. These settlements initially evolved in proximity to Chinese settlers of whom many were poultry and pig farmers. But in the wake of the May 1969 ethnic riots in Kuala Lumpur, they evacuated to the neighbouring Chinese-dominated "new village". The vacuum created by the Chinese attracted Indians, many of whom were part of the wave of thousands who moved to urban centres after being dismissed from plantations during this period. Typically, the migratory path to Kuala Lumpur was often circuitous involving a complex pattern of kinship-linked chain migration between plantations, small towns, large towns and cities (Dillon 1991).

From the 1970s, *pembangunan* (development) as propelled under the New Economic Policy (NEP) brought in its wake various emblems of "development" in thousands of Malay rural and urban *kampung*. Bus-stop shelters, maternity clinics, primary schools, mains water and electricity, telephone lines and narrow tarred village roads peppered and marked the local landscapes. In many cases, particularly in key urban squatter *kampung*, political promises were translated into reality as a showcase for government-sponsored development. Kampung Berjaya was one such settlement. When a substantial portion of the settlement was transformed into Taman Berjaya in the 1980s, parts of Kampung Nehru were also affected. The residents were housed in interim barrack-like accommodation - the *rumah panjang* - situated outside the settlements whilst waiting for the completion of thousands of units of low-cost two-storey cement brick terraced buildings with small front gardens. Subsequently, many Indian residents were considered not eligible to purchase these units, and had to remain in their *rumah panjang*. Once again, some believed that Malays were given preference instead to reside in Taman Berjaya for reasons of political expediency. Nearing the end of fieldwork, however, a substantial number of these Indian

residents were finally relocated to the newly built walk-up flats to make way for a major commercial redevelopment scheme which exploits its proximity to highway and railway routes.

Not all makeshift structures were built by residents themselves. Some settlements mushroomed more collectively and in a centrally planned manner. At the furthest end of Jalan Besar, several hundred units of *rumah panjang* comprise the settlements of Kampung Keretapi and Kampung Selangor (see Plate 9). The residents were relocated to the present site for a variety of reasons. For instance, about 100 families from Kampung Nehru were accommodated here in the mid-1980s when fire destroyed their homes. Others were moved here as a result of government and private development projects affecting their *kampung*. Kampung Keretapi is almost a decade old and is reported to have about 400 households (of predominantly Indians) whilst Kampung Selangor has around 100 Malay households.

Squatter houses are flexible and adaptive structures, exploiting whatever vacant spaces are left on an already congested terrain. Wood is very much favoured as a building material for its resilience and because it can be easily recycled should their homes be brought down by government authorities or private developers. Care is often taken to use jaded-looking materials to give the semblance of being a long-time resident and hopefully avoid detection. In some cases, more than one hearth is tactically built to suggest that there are more households under the same roof and to bolster arguments for more monetary compensation.

Ironically, some residents label the most recent structures as *rumah haram* (illegal houses) believed to be mainly built and occupied by migrant workers from countries such as Indonesia and Bangladesh. Because of the lack of available land these structures skirt along the periphery of the existing *kampung* or are sited on difficult and steep terrain. Quite a number of them are perched precariously along the edges of a high ridge that drops steeply into the *tasik*. When word of the proposed redevelopment got around a few years ago, the locality became even more congested with a phenomenal increase in new houses. According to the developer, two surveys done three years apart between 1989 and 1992 revealed that the number of housing structures grew from about 200 to 800.

Jalan Besar has significance beyond that of merely being an arterial thoroughfare

for people and vehicles. Paved, linear and stretching for a distance of 1 km right into the "heart" of the settlements, it is a metaphorical marker of both difference and assimilation. This thoroughfare will eventually connect to a dual carriageway which, in turn, is part of a network of inner ring highways linking various residential estates in this region of PJ when fully completed. Analogous to the transportation networks in British Malaya radically altering physical and cultural landscapes, the increasing accessibility to these clusters of settlements would likewise effect demographic and aesthetic changes. Not only would the "interior" be further integrated to the "outside" worlds of PJ, Kuala Lumpur and beyond, local social maps would be made redundant, and new signs of social status and power relations would be re-etched on the landscape. Already, there are portentous signs.

A daily traveller of the Jalan Besar corridor is constantly reminded of this sense of duality and of difference. The entire western margin is lined with wooden shops or houses (some in dilapidated conditions) with small gaps in between to allow access to the many *kampung* nestled inside. A wide spectrum of trades is plied: *kedai makan*, groceries, motorcycle-bicycle repairs, video rentals, barber and hairdressing salons, jewellery, clothes, household electrical appliances and compact iron workshops. The *kedai makan*, however, are by far the most numerous and conspicuous. Mobile street vendors add flavour further to the thriving commercial activity along Jalan Besar. A dental-medical clinic, and the only Christian church building in the locality are also found on this side of the road. As noted earlier, because of the concentration of business and traffic congestion, there is a vivid sense of a ceaseless vibrant activity.

Except for a short stretch of similar wooden structures at the beginning of Jalan Besar the eastern corridor, by contrast, conveys a sense of relative stability, inactivity and regimented spaces. The geometric grid of service roads when viewed from the correct angles gives an unhindered panorama of ornamented residential houses, vehicles and people in the distance. Because of the repetitiveness of the structures, there was simultaneously a sense of looking at a hall of mirrors. Like any centrally planned residential estate, Taman Berjaya has its share of "green" spaces and children's playgrounds. Moreover, the estate has an impressive multi-purpose recreational complex. Further away, three large government-run schools have been built to service the large population in the locality.

Significantly, attempts to relocate commercial activities along this side of Jalan

Besar have been unsuccessful to date. Two short rows of modern concrete single-storey shop lots are minimally occupied by businesses even though they had been completed some years before. Various stories were volunteered by informants to explain this anomaly. One convoluted tale alleged that the construction of the shop lots involved acrimony with the evicted shopkeepers who subsequently boycotted them. Another narrative related how rents and purchase prices were unreasonably high, and it would be more profitable to maintain the status quo. However, these idle shop lots were not merely left unused. Ever since they had been built, vandalism and sabotage of the empty shoplots (for electrical wiring, plumbing, and window panes) had frustrated the efforts of developers to attract potential clients. For the present, the sole users are foraging cows and goats which habitually used the shady structures as a resting place during the hot, languid afternoons.

In comparative terms, Jalan Besar is communal space in juxtaposition to the web of small side roads and footpaths that criss-crosses the *kampung*. As a public zone of contact residents are engaged in traffic relationships (Hannerz 1980), impression management and inter-ethnic negotiation. Daily, people traverse, spatially intermingle, converse, and have their meals and snacks in roadside shops. Similarly, a large volume of vehicles of a variety of types, makes, and colours flowed unevenly at regulated times of the day along this main artery. During various auspicious days in the Hindu religious calendar, portions of this thoroughfare were converted to processional routes, temporarily halting or slowing down vehicular traffic and attracting an attentive audience. Similarly, in the fasting month of *Ramadan* (which in 1995 commenced in February), almost the entire length of Jalan Besar was crowded by Malay vendors selling traditional *halal* delicacies (see Plate 4). Sales were visibly brisk and the stalls were popular with employees just returning home from work. Because profits were certain and the extra cash extremely useful for the Hari Raya Puasa celebration which follows later, numerous stalls were temporary establishments. Their simple equipment and paper signboards stood in contrast to the paraphernalia of full-time traders.

The social life of motorcycles

Just as a locality can invoke a range of feelings, consumer goods can likewise be appropriated to embody distinct social relations, self identity and exhibit prestige. As conscious social actors, consumers create social meanings and objectify social relationships in material artefacts. Put differently, commodities have the cultural property of mediating

social relationships and self-identities (Miller 1987). In the squatter *kampung*, unlike the act of constructing houses which require considerable expenditure, labour, and are not readily portable, other kinds of consumer items provide a range of choice, negotiability and opportunities for public display. For most people in Kampung Nehru and the surrounding *kampung*, this would be the motorcycle.

In comparison to other vehicles (like bicycles and motorcars), motorcycles are by far the most numerous and visible. Along Jalan Besar itself there are no less than 6 motorcycle repair shops which operate late into the night. These vehicles offer a desirable degree of spatial mobility and independence from public transport. And because of the comparatively easy payment schemes, they are readily purchased. For now, motorcycles are masculinised in so far as the owners are overwhelmingly men. In the *kedai makan*, motorcycles often cropped up as a popular conversational topic. Tips are exchanged on the finer points of maintenance, their capabilities and kinds of visual enhancement. For newly employed factory workers, this was often the first hoped-for substantial item of purchase when finance permitted. Many also spoke of eventually obtaining larger and faster motorcycles.

Motorcycle "gangs" are common in the *kampung*, and typically exhibit a youth sub-cultural trait of a mocking disregard of and resistance against the law and status quo. In the evenings, they cruise conspicuously along Jalan Besar, perform road acrobatics or gather at strategic spaces to carouse and gaze at young women strolling by. Through various visual and mechanical modifications to the motorcycles - paintwork, stickers, chromed exhaust pipes, and electronic gadgetry - they not only stamp the personal identity of the owner but also enlarge the symbolic capital of the group to which he belongs to. Masculine bravado, sexual prowess, and group cohesiveness are correlated with the motorcycle. Along the deserted highways motorcycle races are not uncommon late at night prompting in turn surprise raids and checks at favoured spots by traffic police. The manoeuvrability of motorcycles also makes oblique statements in other ways. In the mornings and evenings when Jalan Besar is lined almost bumper to bumper with cars and buses, this is particularly evident. Winding skilfully through the remaining narrow gaps, motorcyclists often make their way to the front of the queue with great fanfare. Their engines are revved constantly as if mocking the bigger but hopelessly cumbersome vehicles.

Within the locality, motorcycle riding has a cavalier and relaxed feel about it. Traffic regulations pertaining to the wearing of safety helmets are immediately disregarded once Jalan Besar is reached from the highway. Unrestrained by traffic lights, hand signals and right of way, the rider is only required to be alert to the traffic flows before him. Many also extend this "free space" to just beyond the visible boundaries of the settlement. Jalan Besar cannot be approached directly from the opposite side of the highway because of a metal partition but many motorcyclists, nonetheless, prefer to skirt along the side of the road but against the dominant traffic flow for nearly 50 metres instead of making a legal detour. For small families, the motorcycle is frequently "overloaded" with two or three small children tucked in between two adults. Occasionally, there would be Malay female teenager motorcyclists and this would attract the studied gazes of men.

Doing politics in public spaces

The daily uses of space were periodically disrupted by highly visible ritualised practices parading emblems of national and state identities. Following Scott (1990:66f, see also Kertzer 1988), these events could be read as rhetorical expressions of the dramaturgy of dominant rule meant more for the consumption of the leading actors of the public stage than for the supporting players. For periods clustering around *Merdeka* (in August), the birthday of the Sultan of Selangor (in March) and other politically important events, the display of national and state flags is normally obligatory. However, in comparison to shop houses in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya, this was rather weakly in evidence along Jalan Besar as few shopkeepers bothered to put up these flags. Ironically, the red and orange state flags appeared more prominently during the night of the nation-wide soccer cup final in which the Selangor state team was involved.

During these public holidays, employees in the public sector enjoyed a brief respite from daily work routines. There was time to sleep late, to catch up on local gossip, and to run errands. Those who worked in the private sector or who were self-employed (in street vending), however, did not adhere strictly to this calendrical rhythm but instead found these festive periods to be especially lucrative.

About a month before I concluded fieldwork, the 1995 Malaysian General Elections got underway, and the mood and the spaces within the *kampung* became spectacularly charged. Speculations about the actual dates of the elections had been rife since the last few

months of 1994. Tell-tale signs like the construction of small registration booths around the locality eloquently advertised to the residents months before that the government political machinery had got underway and soon their votes would be canvassed for. Rumours circulated of various closeted meetings and negotiations between local leaders and representatives of political parties. In Kampung Nehru, Ravi explained to me that he had been instructed a few months earlier to conduct a door-to-door visit to determine the approximate number of eligible Indian voters in the vicinity, and to gauge the political mood "at the grassroots". This vital information was then relayed to higher echelons for analysis and strategising. In the *kedai makan*, the topic of conversations gravitated more frequently towards the political pitches and savvy of various local MPs and national leaders. But they were conducted and framed with a keen awareness of the probable political allegiances of their listeners and eavesdroppers.

As a public arena, the *kedai makan* was particularly conducive for the skilful impression management of the "front stage" self (Goffman 1969, cf. Hannerz 1980:202ff). The content of loud coffee shop conversations depended in part on who was around and within earshot at that time. Political views expressed thus fluctuated widely, from loud and extravagant declarations of total and absolute victory by the ruling coalition to the understated and open-ended generalisations. When the *kedai makan* was less crowded, discussions sometimes became more specific. They delved into some of the well-known methods employed to ensure political success like various kinds of financial inducements, veiled threats, and "phantom voters" surfacing from other localities to vote in the constituency. A frequent refrain was the view that people become politicians mainly for their own interests and to increase their wealth and power. For both the speaker and listener, these public utterances were predicated on the implicit understanding that this is "common knowledge" and a "social fact" of the Malaysian political landscape and linguistic market. When I broached the subject of the General Elections, the ensuing discussions were frequently framed within a prefatory sentence (e.g., "Everyone knows...", "As a Malaysian you should know...") that signalled we were entering common fictive territory. This was particularly evident in my conversations with Ravi, the problematic *ketua kampung* and local MIC chairman of Kampung Nehru. In the *kedai makan*, he was prone to speak much louder and with more flourish about the abilities of the ruling coalition vis-à-vis the opposition parties. But in the private setting of his home Ravi was more willing to concede that there were internal inconsistencies and personality flaws behind the facade. Although under normal circumstances I did not qualify as a comparable member of a subordinate

group, my ambivalent status as a "stranger" and as an "uninformed student" provided momentary lapses that allowed our conversations to approximate the less constrained tenor and safety of the "back stage" of ethnic management rhetoric.

A few weeks before the official campaigning period, samples of banners and posters had been hung and plastered at visually strategic places (like street lamp posts and shop walls) during the dead of night. But most were pulled down or defaced within a day or two of their appearance only to reappear again a few days later. Although there are regulations prohibiting this kind of activity, some residents speculated that these posters were one of many exploratory feelers of the political allegiance of the local sites in which they were placed.¹⁴ A recent electoral delineation exercise for the vicinity had embedded Kampung Nehru into a newly created parliamentary constituency. This new constituency was particularly significant for it was carved out of the southern portion of Petaling Jaya - then held by the major opposition party in the country (the Democratic Action Party) - to merge with the areas encompassing my fieldwork site of predominantly Malay residents. Although the State Legislative seat was held by a member of the ruling coalition, the polling details of the last General Election suggested that a sizeable proportion of the Malay populace had also voted for "Semangat 46", a splinter group of UMNO. Subsequently, during the short campaigning period, activity on the hustings was intense. Nightly *ceramah* ("lectures") were conducted in open fields, playgrounds and homes. Every inch of available space was exploited in the poster and bunting symbolic warfare between contending political parties.

With substantially less financial and human resources to muster, the posters of the *Parti Rakyat Malaysia* (Peoples' Party of Malaysia) and *Parti Se Islam Malaysia* (Islamic Party of Malaysia) resembled tiny islands of red and green enveloped by a sea of blue (the colours of *Barisan Nasional*). In a number of places, whole neighbourhoods declared their territorial allegiance to the ruling coalition by deliberately crowding out spaces and defacing any opposition posters (see Plate 10). This prompted a few long-standing residents and seasoned political campaigners to express both optimism and bewilderment at this "ferocious" display. In Kampung Nehru itself, a small team of MIC officials had descended onto the settlement unexpectedly one rainy afternoon a couple of weeks before to publicly depose Ravi. His reputation and influence in the *kampung* had by then dropped to the extent that it was widely rumoured he was verbally abused and assaulted one evening by a group of disgruntled residents. In comparison, Subramaniam was judged by the higher

echelons to have a wider support of the fragmented community and therefore vital in mustering electoral votes. The opportuneness of the moment was not lost on Subramaniam as well. As the General Elections seemed increasingly imminent, he often spoke of convincing MIC leaders of the significance of block voting from residents in Kampung Nehru in determining the final outcome in return for certain benefits for the *kampung* as a whole. As he aptly put it, one must be willing to "play politics". Not long afterwards, his first public act was to erect at his own expense a prominent board with the words, *Undilalah Barisan Nasional* ("Vote for Barisan Nasional") at the entrance to Kampung Nehru.¹⁵

Tactical sociality

Unlike centrally planned residential estates which have street names and maps, navigating within the settlements is bewildering for the "outsider". Familiarity with the labyrinth of footpaths is only rendered possible through constant use. Indeed, the first few weeks of fieldwork often found me confused and lost on one of these serpentine paths. Traversing along these ribbons of public space, there are obvious nodes of sociality. For instance, the numerous *balai raya* (community hall), grocery shops, *kedai makan*, *surau* (local mosque), roadside shrines, *sepak takraw* and badminton courts provide places for social and religious interaction, and the cultivation of a sense of a local community.

But there are significant invisible boundaries as well that demarcate segmented public spaces. One indicator was the footpaths themselves. These conduits vary in widths and material conditions. In some parts, they are wide enough for two cars straddling side-by-side to negotiate through whilst in others only a single motorcycle or bicycle would comfortably pass at any one time. On extraordinary occasions (e.g., wedding and birthday celebrations or funerals) when more space is required for visitors and guests, a portion of the footpaths fronting the houses would be blockaded and converted for use. Functioning as a momentary extension of the house, the neighbouring residents are usually informed weeks earlier so that car owners make alternative detours and parking arrangements.

Sections of the settlements are also served with tarred roads but with the combination of sub-standard foundation materials and constant use, potholes often appear. Some residents commented wryly that they would almost certainly be repaired by the local authorities just before the quadrennial General Elections as an inducement to solicit their support. However, the sight of tarred roads ending abruptly and dusty stony paths

continuing further into other parts of the settlement suggests that such attempts at rapprochement are not necessarily a blanket *fait accompli*. A well-known and widely circulated political "fact" portrays the Malay ethnic community as being the preferred objects of government patronage. Infrastructure like roads, electricity and water supplies are readily made more available as a result of initiatives of aspiring local branch leaders or as a showcase display of the political clout of prospective political candidates. Put differently, a tarred road network has significance beyond its material use but signifies political potency and ascribed ethnic sociality and boundaries. Kampung Nehru itself has a tarred access road into the "Hindu side" of the settlement but unlike the surrounding settlements, it is maintained by a temple committee member who is a self-employed road contractor as well. Once a year, during the temple's *thiruvila* celebration, a fresh layer of gravel and tar is laid over the previous year's worn-out path that snakes for about 50 metres from the main road before ending just short of an earth clearing fronting the Mariyamman *kovil* (see Map 3). Two narrow earth footpaths branch off at this point. One serves a settlement which has over the years become increasingly occupied by Malay residents whilst the other is still identified as part of the traditional sector of Kampung Nehru. Although the houses are virtually spatially back to back, there are significant boundaries as suggested by the presence of two *ketua kampung* - one each for the Indian and Malay components of the settlements respectively.

Each *ketua* is further embedded in a series of overlapping spheres of organisational structures. Like the Resident Associations of PJ, there is a Resident or Settlement Committee which is made up of committee members who ideally represent a certain number of households found in various zones within the settlement. The president-elect becomes the *ketua kampung* or *talaivar* (in Tamil) who, as the guardian and gate-keeper of the settlement, assumes a wide range of responsibilities - settling disputes, liaising with relevant authorities on matters pertaining to welfare, basic amenities and housing, helping people obtain ICs (colour-coded identification cards), raising donations and so forth. His multiple roles often coincide with being a spiritual mentor (as a member of the temple or mosque committees) and with being a mediator of the larger state and national political machinery (UMNO or MIC). To obtain the desired material benefits for the residents of his *kampung*, the *ketua*'s choice of whom to seek out for help is largely socially constrained and politically structured. Because the *raison d'être* of mainstream Malaysian politics is ethnically maintained and animated, he has to resort to a vertical rapprochement with the brokers of power even though his personal views might be different. In comparison, a

collective cross-ethnic horizontal linkage is regarded as not as effective in getting ahead. In the context of a perceived hostile and competitive environment of the city, this line of action seems to be the most sensible.

In purchasing or renting an abode, it is customary to view not only the house proper but also the distinguishing features of the surrounding environment. The availability of shops, public transport, distance from one's place of work, and the ethnic and social makeup of neighbouring residents are some of the considerations that come into play. In Malaysia, the phenomenon of ethnically distinct and segregated residential areas is commonly acknowledged. Similarly, in squatter settlements spatial segregation of various ethnic groups holds true as well. Various studies (e.g., Dillon 1991, Rajoo 1985a) have borne out the claim that the formation of Indian squatter settlements is often the result of a combination of spontaneous and carefully negotiated efforts. In the case of the settlement studied by Dillon, she reported that there were prior discussions with the relevant authorities on the areas to be occupied by the prospective occupants when tin mining activities ceased. Consequently, Indian residents were requested to form a "buffer zone" between the Chinese and Malay portions of the settlements. Many Chinese residents were farmers rearing pigs and poultry as well as being engaged in vegetable gardening. Droppings from these animals were pragmatically used for refertilising the sandy soil. Dogs as pets and watch animals were also kept.¹⁶

The case of Kampung Nehru, however, moved along a slightly dissimilar track. When tin mining activities were still in progress, a few of the employees stayed in dwellings constructed by the company. The employees were largely Chinese but also included some Malays, South Indians and Punjabis. In the 1960s when activities ceased with the expiry of its lease with the state government, many chose to move out. However, some also remained and sought other kinds of waged labour. Many Chinese residents preferred to be self-employed and turned to poultry, pig-rearing and vegetable farming aimed for the commercial food market. Gradually, the original settlers were joined by a steady stream of migrating Indians and Malays who built houses close to similar ethnic groups. By the mid-1960s, there was a recognisable ethnic flavour to the landscape even though there was still plenty of unoccupied land. Bala who arrived in the locality in the late 1960s, for instance, described nostalgically his home as initially surrounded by wide open spaces with *belukar* (secondary vegetation) and the occasional shady tree. However, as land nearer to Jalan Kelang Lama became occupied, later migrants turned to less accessible

areas. Even by the late 1970s, a similar kind of terrain could still be found in the interior. Indeed, for Matthew and his friends who are in their late 20s, this stretch of space was given the nick-name of "The High Chaparral" following a popular cowboy TV series during this period. Whilst drainage in Kampung Nehru was comparatively better, other settlements that sprang up on low lying and swampy areas suffered constantly from flooding and the infestation of mosquitoes.

Amidst the phenomenal expansion of PJ, the constant influx of settlers into the area, and the growth of Kampung Berjaya nearby, it was felt that its existence had to be more securely founded and clearly bounded. A former *ketua* recounted that part of the reason for adopting the name of Kampung Nehru, the formation of a Settlement Committee, and the establishment of formal links with the MIC in the mid-1960s was to obtain "spillover" amenities (water standpipes and electricity) as a result of being seen as closely aligned to the neighbouring Malay residents. Later, about 80 households in the north-western sector of the *kampung* agreed to a request to join and enlarge the population of Kampung Pinang (of mainly Malay residents) as part of their own efforts to further improve their bargaining power with the local authorities.

There were also other kinds of initiatives to secure amenities and construct a sense of community. By the mid-60s, a generation of Christian rethinking about "development" and "modernisation" had stimulated certain theological innovations in the social teachings of the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches (e.g., see Fabella and Torres 1980). These perspectives injected a critical view of the dominant Christian discourse perceived as overly dependent on Western epistemologies. Various experimental projects were launched in a number of "developing" or "Third World" countries. Generally, they sought to strike a pragmatic balance between evangelism, traditional welfarism and grassroots activism. Kampung Nehru and the surrounding Indian settlements were one of a number of sites chosen for these activities. A small team of Catholic nuns and volunteers succeeded in setting up a medical clinic as well as a kindergarten. They also attended to a range of everyday needs like food, clothing, literacy, and helping to process official documents like birth certificates and ICs. Other groups organised on a regular basis communal activities like building drains, clearing rubbish, setting up food co-operatives, and regular discussion sessions on factory working conditions and workers' rights. Through these activities it was hoped that a more critical attitude could be inculcated and translated into a more cohesive voice vis-à-vis other interest groups. Not surprisingly, these efforts were also viewed with

some suspicion by local leaders and politicians. Not only did the official patronage network which sustains mainstream ethnic politics appear to be put to question but there were fears that a more sophisticated and low-profile form of Christian proselytization was being attempted.

In the formative period of the settlements, these initiatives proved to be of some benefit to new arrivals especially to those without any support networks. Whilst many were able to improve on their financial situation later, there are still pockets of residents who are relatively disadvantaged. Arguably, in the intervening years some of these gains have been recast in terms that take cognisance of the major nation-wide shifts in the political and religious terrain. Informed by a discourse constituted in terms of sharply defined ethnic and religious identities, residents are more hesitant to be seen as crossing these boundaries. Additionally, at a more localised level, competing factions aligned to two rival *kampung* residents jockeying for the privilege of being a political broker in the patronage network had precipitated a killing in the early 1980s in Kampung Nehru. This event powerfully marked the memories of residents and subsequently contributed to a fragmented *kampung*. Reflecting these changed circumstances, Subramaniam frequently remarked that Kampung Nehru does not seem to attract political attention these days. Residents are largely left to rely on their own abilities and resources. In no small measure, the uninspiring leadership of Ravi was a constant refrain.

Early in my fieldwork, I was alerted to Ravi's claim of having "good relationships" with his *ketua* counterpart in Kampung Pinang. Indeed, I was keen to find out whether his view was more widely held. Given the difficulties that I encountered during fieldwork and short of asking explicitly phrased questions, casual conversations and the nature of "face-work" and "eye-contact" became important surrogate indicators (cf. Goffman 1969). As I have suggested earlier, the web of footpaths within the settlements act as ribbons of sociality and public zones of cross-cultural encounters. Puzzlingly, not many residents even within Kampung Nehru appear to be acquainted with each other through personal names apart from their own immediate support network of family and relatives. For instance, when I made casual references to other residents, a typical response would be a quizzical, unknowing look. Instead, these individuals were vicariously identified by the location and colour of their dwelling houses or the type and number plate of their vehicles (most commonly a motorcycle). In the evenings, social interaction (in the form of greetings and conversations) between adult residents was sparse. Even in private conversations with my

key informants, they were reticent about the affairs of other residents. Deftly, the topic of conversation was turned to other more safe areas.

This kind of distancing and avoidance is exhibited even more sharply between Indian and Malay residents. I mentioned above that Kampung Nehru is served by a short stretch of tarred road from Jalan Besar. Being a convenient passageway in and out of the settlement, Malay residents of Kampung Pinang living behind Kampung Nehru chose to traverse this stretch of space to reach their homes rather than take a circuitous alternative. But this effectively meant that they would have to pass not only Indian homes but also be in close proximity to the Mariyamman *kovil* (see Map 3). Throughout my entire fieldwork period, I did not witness any explicit verbal exchanges between these two groups. As Malay residents walked or cycled down the road, eyes seldom strayed, possibly to avoid a potentially uncomfortable situation. Greetings of recognition were conspicuously absent. During the many Hindu religious festivals that were conducted in the *kovil*, the feast of visual and audio drama would, however, attract the attention of a few curious Malay spectators, particularly the children. But they would invariably remain in the night shadows or looked on from the doorsteps of their homes.

Even in the relatively communal and egalitarian spaces of the market places, the *pasar malam* and *kedai makan*, the forms of avoidance described were not wholly suspended. Although the vendors were a mixture of Malays and Indians, customers tended to patronise stalls managed by similar ethnic groups. Partly, this is understandable as different kinds of spices and specialised ingredients are used for Indian and Malay cuisine. But in recent years, these differences have been accentuated by the promotion and enforcement of *halal* food for Muslims with subsequent spill over effects into the areas of sociality.¹⁷ For instance, a number of Malay-owned *kedai makan* along Jalan Besar took over the making and sale of *roti canai* (a tasty pancake-like bread) traditionally monopolised by Indians as well as the customary range of Indonesian and Thai dishes. Generally, non-Indians did not consume food and drinks at Indian-owned shops and vice-versa. Nonetheless, there were transitory breaches of these boundaries in a number of ways necessitated by pragmatic considerations. Despite the presence of a few Malay-run unisex hair salons with women employees to entice male customers, Indian barber shops were still popularly frequented by both ethnic groups because of the latter's lower price range. In other cases, the element of choice was absent. Thus, motorcycle-bicycle repair shops - largely managed by Indians - were by far the busiest establishments visited by all ethnic

groups.

Notwithstanding these transgressions, the boundaries are still intact and palpable. For young men and women, the possibility of cross-ethnic relationships is daunting and entails some risks of disapproval and reprisals by both sides. If there are liaisons, they have to be discreet and away from prying eyes within the locality. As Guna, a young man in his early 20s put it, "in the *kampung* we can only look from a distance but not touch". The object of their gazes and occasional verbal advances are the "modern-looking" and desirable young Malay women. In comparison, unmarried Indian women in the settlement are viewed as more "traditional", risky, and unapproachable because of the protective cloak of custom, family and relatives around them. Sometimes, these gazes and desires are translated into stealthy action. The *pasar malam* and mini bus rides are the favourite sites for transgressing boundaries. Hoping for the anonymity and safety accorded by cramped conditions and crowds, young women's bodies are touched, pinched and groped. Occasionally, acrimonious quarrels and fist fights had also arisen when Malay youths went into Kampung Nehru to seek out and punish the alleged perpetrators.

The politics of urban morals

Processes of modern urbanism have created novel features in cities and large urban centres. Invariably, these involve a shrinking land bank, a greater dependence on waged labour, an adherence to a disciplined and regimented use of time and space, and the crafting of new political and social consciousness. But reconstituting gender in space is also integral to these processes. In Victorian Britain, for instance, Elizabeth Wilson (1991:20) has argued that the phenomenal growth of cities involved utopian attempts at imposing a rationalised masculine order through the regulation of urban populations and the fixing of women in their perceived rightful place. In a similar vein, Ong (1995) contends that a discursive concern with women, and the regulation of their bodies by nationalist and religious elites constitute key and powerful elements in the social construction of a modern Malaysian society.

In the city, there are corporeal dangers and risks that women find especially intimidating and repressive. Nonetheless, the carnivalesque aspects and indeterminacy of urban spaces have also liberative dimensions that offer welcome departures from traditional cultural norms and strictures (e.g., see Wilson 1991, Rose 1993). Midway

through my fieldwork, an instance of these tensions between gendered moral spaces came to the foreground. Considerable media attention was focused on the phenomena of *bohsia* girls (literally "no sound" in the Hokkien dialect). These were predominantly female teenagers and adolescent school children who frequented public places in the late evenings. Ironically, a popular gathering point in Kuala Lumpur is a former colonial recreational complex - the archetypal symbol of British domination - now transformed into a prominent square for *Merdeka* (Independence Day) parades and nation-wide televised display of cultural events. It was reported that many of these girls were "picked up" by men in flashy motorcycles and cars, and sexual favours were often granted in exchange for small sums of money and gifts (like perfume, jewellery and trendy clothes). Unlike seasoned sex workers, *bohsia* girls cited "fun" and "boredom" as the motivating reasons for their nocturnal activities. For weeks, various cabinet ministers, community and religious leaders expressed outrage, and *bohsia* girls together with their parents were severely chastised as an affront to national pride. Numerous police raids that were conducted in Kuala Lumpur and other major towns throughout the country were detailedly reported in the media. In the many forums that ensued, various reasons for this social anomie were offered. They ranged from immoral influences as mediated in Western films and pop songs to the lack of firm parental guidance.¹⁸

A preoccupation with gender roles and traditional family ideals permeates nationalist discourses. A characteristic feature of these discourses is that there is a play of histories and cultural difference. The hierarchy of the binary opposition of the "West and the Rest" is inverted, various differentiated Western cultures are homogenised, and nationalist aspirations and fears are projected onto the West (cf. Hall 1992). This trope underscores the need to preempt the social and political disjunctions unleashed by rapid technological and economic growth. Whilst the benefits of "modernisation" are to be appropriated, the afflictions of Western secularism and liberalism are also to be strenuously avoided. Following Chatterjee (1993), these discourses can be viewed as tied to a strategic separation of the "outer" domain of the "material" - economy, science, technology, and statecraft - from the "inner" domain of the "spiritual". Whilst the "outer" domain traditionally monopolised by the "industrialised West" is to be meticulously studied and replicated, the "inner" domain is to be impervious to the intrusion of "the West". For postcolonial rulers, this two-fold division abets the formulation of a nationalist culture that is imputed as manifestly "modern" and yet "not Western". The marker of "being Western" is typically articulated in terms of a loss of spiritual bearings (i.e. secularism)

leading to the prevalence of marital breakdowns, single parenthood, pornography, and sexual promiscuity.

Throughout 1994, the occasion of the "International Year of the Family" provided an opportune emblematic vehicle for disparate institutions and organisations to feed their respective and competing models into this discourse for the consumption of the urban clientele. Ideals as derived and constructed from various sacred scriptures, Asian cultures, and modern feminism were projected as equally viable paths to explore in the cultural complexity of modern Malaysia. For instance, slogans and aphorisms like "Love Your Family" and "*Rumahku Syurgaku*" ("My home is my heaven") etched on giant billboards and broadcasted on prime time television had idiosyncratic parallels like the Roman Catholic "A Family United in God is a Communion of Hearts" or the Adventist "Create Your Own Family Traditions To Bring God's Love Home" or the feminist "Women's Rights: Our Heritage, Our Vision".

Similarly, a prominent discursive feature of government forward planning has been to imprint a desired social *habitus* onto the present attitudes and behaviour of the young. For years, politicians have been expressly concerned with the phenomenon of "loitering" (*lepak*) in shopping complexes and other public spaces. Particularly prevalent amongst Malay teenagers and young adults, the "*lepak* culture" is perceived as an unhealthy carry over of the idyllic pace of *kampung* life and a worrying indicator of ill-adjustment to cosmopolitan living. In some arguments, the increasing numbers of drug addicts are strongly correlated to this malaise. In the wake of these incidents, the government launched with considerable media fanfare the *Rakan Muda* ("Young Friends") scheme in the middle of 1994. Conceptualised by a commercial public relations firm, youths and young adults were targeted for a range of recreational activities (e.g., martial arts, camping, cultural dances and so forth) that were considered socially cohesive and morally uplifting. Residents in Kampung Nehru spoke of the *Rakan Muda* scheme with an eclectic mix of cynicism and hopeful anticipation. A few working male youths commented that because of their arduous working hours, they would not realistically have the opportunity to participate in any of the numerous publicised activities. Some felt that the scheme would be yet another passing fancy that benefited certain social classes more than others. Parents, in contrast, agreed that the expressed ideals are worthwhile in the light of the reported upward spiralling crime rate amongst Indians.¹⁹ But they were also uncertain whether the scheme could percolate to the locality. But for emerging local leaders like Subramaniam, the strategic value of the

Rakan Muda rhetoric was not lost. The excitement generated through the media hype could be appropriated to animate Indian youths for various community-building activities, and to identify and nurture another echelon of local leaders for the future.²⁰

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to represent the key features of the locality so as to better appreciate the specific ambience within which residents live, work, play and socially interact. Although marked by different constellations of routines and everyday activities, there are certain salient aspects that emerge.

Perhaps the most significant is that permeable flows of people, ideas and objects render problematic the notion of a hermetically sealed "village community" or a static "urban village". At the most obvious level this is evidenced by the availability of public transportation and modern media. Residents are thus readily subjected to the myriad and changing social and political forces that are typically found in cities and large urban centres.

Within the clusters of squatter *kampung*, I highlighted evidence to suggest that there is a mix of both harmonious and oppositional social linkages. Whilst there are stable groupings of people and support networks like kinship, religious and political affiliations providing important associational relationships, there is also social distancing between and within them. I suggest that this is partly because some of these relationships are historically structured on an ethnicised and competitive basis which not only frame them in terms of impermeable boundaries but at times also provide fertile grounds for dissension and acrimonious quarrels.

The texture of these relationships is manifested in public spaces, in a localised street etiquette where there is a visible differentiation notably along political, ethnic and gender lines. Residents develop standardised ways of orienting and behaving towards one another. These differences may be deliberately "over-communicated" in public and casual interactions whilst in other contexts they are "under-communicated". For children, these invisible boundaries assume a progressively commonsensical fact with habitual instruction and demarcation. Additionally, under these socially disadvantaged circumstances, youth gangs represent another significant mode of consolidating and exhibiting an ethnic sub-

identity and cohesiveness. Although not exclusively so, the clustering of dwelling houses adheres to ethnic and religious markers as well. In a similar vein, the numerous *kedai makan* dotted throughout the locality and around the *tasik* are either exclusively Malay or Indian male enclaves. In comparison, the open-air morning markets and the *pasar malam* are comparatively unmarked and fluid. Indeed, these spaces here are maximised by different street vendors using the same spot at different times of the day. At these sites, collectivised boundaries collapse for individual negotiation in face-to-face encounters and interactions.

The daily routines of adult men and women move through sequential spheres of waged labour, domestic work, and play. Typically, married women have to bear the multiple tasks of cooking, washing and child-care as well as being subjected to the regimented time and bodily disciplines of factory shift work. Within the locality, self-employment in the form of street vending and *kedai makan* also thrives, and for many they offer more independence from the constraints of waged labour. The phenomenal growth of numerous squatter *kampung* in the locality is not accidental, and involved a bundle of carefully negotiated as well as *ad hoc* pragmatic reasons. These *kampung* not only provide a significant pool of labour (albeit mainly young unmarried women) for nearby factories but also for other industrial zones sites at greater distances.

The squatter *kampung*'s characteristically dense population makes it a popular target for political patronage. In Kampung Nehru, despite the many material benefits derived as a consequence of being politically aligned with the MIC, some residents have ambivalent feelings towards the kinds of discord and fragmentation that this practice occasionally engenders. The vagaries of partisan politics do not always sit well with the ideals of village community life. But mainly because residents do not possess either the leisure time or linguistic capital in abundance, many cede their power to the party which claims to best represent their interests. The absence of a viable alternative option in the wider political landscape also structures residents to keep to the status quo for fear of losing more ground to other ethnic groups. During specific periods (e.g., the general elections), the politics of ethnic group solidarity become particularly stark which at other times recede to the background. By and large, however, a tactical kind of sociality is resorted to as an avenue of coping and making sense of contradictory experiences. For the present moment, the *kampung* is socially fragmented and consensual action, let alone a collective protest, is difficult because of the absence of a widely recognised and accepted local leader (*talaivar*) who epitomises a "personalised social trust" (Mines 1992)..

NOTES

1. Squatter settlements within PJS came under the council's jurisdiction only in 1993. The council reported that these squatter areas would be redeveloped into housing estates within the next three years. Whilst waiting for low-cost houses to be built, the council would provide basic amenities although it was recognised that "most of the squatter areas already have water and electricity supply but we will strive to create a better environment by providing garbage collection" ('Houses for squatters in PJS', *The Star*, 1 May, 1995).
 2. Because each factory uniform has their own distinctive colours and tailoring, it is possible to form an idea of the pattern of the factory labour force living in the locality through a crude headcount. From the vantage point of my regular *kedai makan*, I would hazard a figure of around 1,000 persons. About 7 out of every 10 persons would be Malays, and a similar portion for women in terms of gender mix.
 3. The uniform can be interpreted as an extreme form of conventional dressing in which the costume is totally determined by others. It identifies the wearer as an anonymous member of a group, situates him/her within a hierarchy, and signifies that the right to act as an individual in terms of speech can be partially or wholly censored.
 4. For an anthropological study of the strategies of industrial work discipline in an electronics multinational company in Selangor and gender resistance, see Ong 1987.
 5. See EP Thompson's pioneering essay, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism' reprinted in EP Thompson 1991. In a study along a similar theme in a colonial context, see Cooper 1992.
 6. More recently, attention has been turned to the relatively understudied aspects of safety and health in electronics factories. Workers are seldom informed of the toxicity of the chemicals that they are handling nor is personal protective equipment always provided. But because these workers have few better alternatives, they tolerate these situations (see Chee 1994, especially pp 81-102).
 7. In the course of fieldwork, I came across scores of young Indonesian women employed as migrant labour in the FTZ. They resided in a row of newly built four-storey shophouses across Kampung Nehru.
 8. The most recent celebrated case is that of RCA Electronics Company. When the Labour Minister announced that in-house unions would be permitted in the electronics industry in early 1989, employees of the said company formed a union. The company refused to recognise the union and circumvented this by changing the company's name to Harris Solid State Malaysia (HSSM). The union followed suit and brought the matter up with the Industrial Relations Department which gave the management 14 days to recognise the union. On the eve of the expiry date, HSSM once again set up a new company, Harris Advanced Technology, and transferred all its workers except the union committee members.
- For details on the trade union movement in Malaysia, see Arokia Dass 1991, Jomo and Todd 1994, Ramasamy 1991, and Stenson 1980.
9. In May 1992, the Ministry of Information increased the airtime for Radio 6 to 18 hours a day which met with positive response by various Indian leaders. Hindu leaders, however,

also requested more religious content to these broadcasts as it was believed that more Indians tune in to the radio than read the newspapers.

10. Football was introduced to British Malaya in the 1880s as a game played by Europeans. Malays soon became particularly fond of the game, and to induce reluctant Malay boys to attend school, it became official policy to have a football pitch in addition to a Qur'an teacher - "one of the greatest incentives to attendance at school is the proximity of a football ground...their enthusiasm over a game of association football is extraordinary" (cited in Gullick 1987:332f).

11. About half of primary-school Indian children in Malaysia study in Tamil schools. These schools have the highest dropout rates and rank lowest in national examinations. About 10 percent of students entering Tamil primary schools complete 11 years of education, and about 3 percent go on to university studies ('Class divide', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 19 October, 1995).

12. More specifically, the breakdown was as follows:- South Indian Tamils (77.1 percent), Malayalis (9.3 percent), Telugus (4.5 percent), Punjabis (4.8 percent) and Malays (4.2 percent). The religious affiliation comprises Hindus (80 percent), Muslims (7.4 percent), Christians (5.4 percent) and Sikhs (4.0 percent). Background details to the settlement are derived from Rajoo's study (1985a).

13. Nearing the end of fieldwork, a small section of the *kampung* was demolished and the residents relocated to the newly built flats situated at the other end of Jalan Besar.

14. Bunting was comparatively less practised and widespread in the middle-class residential estates.

15. *Barisan Nasional* eventually chalked up its biggest victory since *Merdeka*, capturing 162 parliamentary seats out of a possible 192, and garnering 64 percent of the popular vote. Political commentators noted a significant non-Malay swing towards the *Barisan* especially in urban areas where the Chinese are known to be anti-establishment.

16. For Muslims, pigs and dogs are proscribed animals.

17. Together with other markers, a concern with the *halal-haram* divide is metonymic with the reassertion of Islam in the "public" spheres. For detailed and varied discussions on "Islamization" in Malaysia, see Hussein 1988, Hussin 1990, Lee 1988, Mehmet 1990, Muhammad 1992, Muzaffar 1987, Nagata 1994; 1984; 1986, Nash 1991, Northcott 1991, Peletz 1993, Shamsul 1994, von der Mehden 1987, and Wazir 1992.

18. Various women's organisations criticised the stance adopted by police authorities on this matter. Instead of endeavouring to make the streets more safe for women, they noted that the spectre of female immorality in public spaces reflected more of the anxieties of a male-dominated public sphere. A backlash has involved derogatory taunts of *bohsia* and indiscriminate questioning by police officers targeted at young women seen walking unaccompanied at night.

19. Various police statistics have been cited to substantiate the claim that Indians are disproportionately involved in crime and are experiencing moral decline more rapidly than other ethnic groups. In 1994, for example, 128 of 377 murders were committed by Indians. Indian gangs have also eclipsed what is considered to be a traditional Chinese domain in extortion, drug-pushing and robbery (51 of 102 gangs). Between 1990-93, about 1,700

Indians committed suicide compared to 568 Chinese and 343 Malays (See 'Underclass Blues. Indian minority fails to benefit from economic boom', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 19 October, 1995).

20. A few months after I concluded fieldwork, a "street football" competition was organised by the youths of Kampung Nehru, and teams from the surrounding *kampung* were invited to participate.

Chapter Four

HOUSE, KAMPUNG AND TAMAN:

Accommodating differences

The previous chapter mapped the social organisation of space and the nature of routine activities in the locality of Kampung Nehru. In this chapter, the discussion is narrowed to the spaces inside and immediately surrounding the dwelling houses. Whilst living conditions in a squatter *kampung* are typically depicted as "chaotic", "congested" and "unsanitary", I argue that these imputed images do not necessarily square with lived realities. Moreover, although the mushrooming of "squatter colonies" can be accounted for in terms of the lack of affordable public housing, I wish to suggest that this is a partial picture. People also choose to live in these places and build (and modify) dwelling structures that suit their individual aesthetic and pragmatic requirements. The second half of the chapter relates the kinds of changes that are being made to bear on the squatter *kampung*, the use of modern housing (*taman*) as a cultural commodity to refashion human imagination, and the varied responses to the development of high density accommodation.

A few preliminary remarks may be helpful to situate the following discussion in the context of the vast corpus of scholarship on South Asians. Before the critiques on orientalist scholarship took root, the life-worlds and actions of Indians were depicted as permeated by the notion of the sacred as a whole or as expressions of underlying structures (e.g., caste). Scholars were predisposed to depict the typical "Indian mind" as merely *homo religiosus* or as a religious automaton constituted by various "essences" mediated through a history of human institutions (e.g., tightly encapsulated villages) and civilisations which were stable, and of a determinate nature or structure. The historical agency of Indians was given minimal play and they were treated as though they were simply the accidents of a substantialised agent both in terms of idealist and materialist propositions. Typically, the Hindu Indian thinks "in mythic, symbolic, and ritualist rather than in historical, semiotic, and practical terms" or the actions of Indian agents were departures from a rationalist, utilitarian and individualist human nature (Inden 1990:263). These images persist in contemporary ethnographic research, and the binds and intricacies of cross-cultural translation and representation are well-known. Apart from the intellectually and culturally specific baggage of the researcher, "making sense" of the "Other" is made more formidable by the elasticity of language, aggravated further when complex metaphysical notions of a

different language and culture are encountered.¹ Notwithstanding the specific theoretical framework used, what is of particular relevance in this inter subjective encounter is a fluency with the informant's language. In my case, the medium of communication with my informants was either in patois English or Malay. An unfamiliarity with the vernacular - Tamil and Telegu - meant that subtle linguistic nuances could not be registered. Whilst certain details will have to be forsaken until a later time and some observations might be provisional, the main contentions of this chapter however remain.

The ideal Tamil house

Based on the ethnographic evidence available, I wish to show in this section how local circumstances and contexts engender various departures from idealised schemes. Social actors are both constrained and freed to modify their practices in accordance with the circumstances within which they are located. More specifically, I argue that as largely low-caste and working class Indians embedded in the historical specificity of Kampung Nehru, there are opportunities to dilute dominant ideologies as well as conscript fragmented elements in order to reflect emerging social and class status.

In Indian society, the family is deemed to be the basic unit, and cross-cousin marriages are the usual mechanism to extend and consolidate kinship ties. As in numerous other societies, the "house" designates not only a physical structure but the group of kin who are living in it or claim a membership in it (e.g., Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995). It is a significant arena for reproducing cultural practices and social relations. Translated into domestic space, the prototypical Tamil Hindu house is constructed on the model of a patrilocal family dwelling although it is not uncommon that there will be a married daughter and a matrilocal son-in-law temporarily sharing the house at one stage of the family's developmental cycle. Ideally, the head of the household is the most senior male (*talaivar*, "headman") who is regarded as responsible for mediating who may enter legitimately into the domestic arena.

The context-specificity and figurative nature of the Tamil language has been widely studied. In its usage, the line that divides the figurative from the literal is permeable. As Valentine Daniel (1984:106) has characterised it, Tamil is essentially a language favouring metonym over metaphor, and synecdoche over metonym. Spaces and territory are described in person-centric terms, and there is a comparative absence of a universal code-

of-conduct for all individuals. Instead, rules vary according to *jati*,² the stages of life one is in, and idiosyncratic circumstances (Ibid.:70f). In this schema, the dwelling house is more than just a structure built to the specifications of the owner. Like a child, the house is conceived, is born and changes during a formative period and may eventually die. The house as a structure is not static and complete; "it is in a state of becoming, developing, and expanding (Ibid.:134). Moreover, like people, houses are built very close to another to foster companionship. As living rather than inert beings, houses are said to affect their occupants, and are in turn affected by the mixing of substances that come into contact with it. There is thus a particular concern with vulnerable thresholds like doors and windows.

A prototypical Tamil house (*vitu*) is situated within an enclosed yard or compound (*valavu*) usually walled with masonry or galvanised metal, or barricaded with barbed wire and sharpened stakes, to discourage intruders like stray animals and thieves.³ Sheltering the compound will be stands of coconut, banana, mango and arecanut as well as ornamental plants of hibiscus and temple flowers. A house is oriented away from dangerous lines of force (especially the northeast-southwest diagonal) and away from peripheral zones on the south and west ceded to malevolent spirits like *peey*.⁴ Defecation, considered as a ritually impure activity appropriate for this demonic sector, is usually located near the periphery of the compound.

The house should be ideally oriented to the auspicious east. In cases where this is not possible, a formal and aesthetically appropriate doorway to the north, south or west is constructed (but which is seldom used in daily life). The ideal house should have four rooms - a secure, windowless "inner room" (*ullutu*) considered to be the sacred axis of the house for storing grain, valuables and worshipping Hindu deities; two sleeping rooms flanking the "inner room" to the north and south; and a public reception room onto which the other three rooms open. In economically poorer homes, a thatched veranda may substitute for the reception room. If there is only one room used for sleeping, it will be the northern one (*mancutu*) which is the connubial chamber par excellence. Southern and western rooms are unpopular for sleeping because of their directional association with death and decline. Yaman, the messenger of death, arrives from the south, and the western sunset has strong symbolic connotations of entropy and decline.

In organising Hindu space, two interlocking basic principles are pervasive in order to safeguard its integrity. Firstly, the domestic space should be maintained in a manner so

as to welcome the beneficent forms of the divine and to repel the malevolent forces. Thus, in Hindu homes it is common to find a string of natural (or, more recently, synthetic) mango leaves (*thoranam*) - and sometimes margosa plants - together with a portrait of a Hindu deity hanging over the lintel. On the threshold floor, painted auspicious designs (*kolam* or *yantra*) mark the boundary between the inside and outside of the house. In Hindu cosmology, the mango leaves and tree symbolise a positive valence - fertility, fruitfulness, coolness and so forth - in opposition to the antithetical forces of pollution, death and decay. Moreover, to ensure that the deity is successfully incorporated into this space as an honoured guest, it is also required that the relationships between the divine and the human be routinely attended to. Through a daily hospitality to the *devas* in the form of *puja* and the seasonal observances of rituals, the social order and material well-being of Hindu spaces are kept in proper balance. Analogous to an inverted spatial order of the Hindu temple, the successful performance of these principles constitute as a rite of passage which transforms the building into a domain fit for the habitation of both human beings and the divine (Mearns 1989).

It has been observed that practices that keep a structured distance between various caste segments of Hindu and Indian society are more likely to be strictly adhered to by middle and high ranking rather than low ranking castes. This extends as well to the construction of dwelling structures according to the traditional tenets set out in building manuals. For diaspora Indians, however, various modifications to this ideal schema have been engendered. As elsewhere in other colonies, the division of labour and reciprocity according to the *jajmani* system could not be fully replicated because of the nature of migration and labour recruitment although the notions of caste-ness continue to be salient. In particular, the exigencies of migrating to British Malaya as largely low-ranking caste male South Indians deployed in indentured labour without the prospect of landed property meant that the rigid adherence to these principles was progressively undermined, neglected or wilfully forgotten over time. Later, when migrants included women and whole communities, prolonged residence in monolithic plantation barracks where there was minimal freedom to build houses to suit their particular needs or where the management did not guarantee that kin would be located close by also led to a predominantly nucleated family structure (Jain 1970). In many cases, moreover, sub-standard plantation barracks not only negatively affected health conditions but also militated against those standards that sustain rigid caste distinctions and practices.⁵ In the depots, on the ships, and at the plantations, South Indians of a variety of castes, sub-castes and statuses congregated

haphazardly to eat, sleep and work causing mutual defilement. South Indians migrating to ethnically mixed urban centres were particularly exposed to conditions that required further modifications to traditional attitudes and practices (cf. Vertovec 1991).

More to the point, the establishment of Indian "squatter" houses and settlements whilst allowing a greater degree of flexibility in housing structures, nevertheless, depended as well on the extent to which there was the prerequisite knowledge of the ideal Hindu house and the ecological constraints under which these houses were built. In Kampung Nehru, various of these factors come to the foreground. In his study, Rajoo (1985a) identified about 20 different sub-castes existing in Kampung Nehru, and divided them broadly into "non-Brahmins" and "Adi Dravidas" with the latter forming the large majority. Whilst caste was seldom a topic of everyday conversation, Rajoo also reported of various distancing practices in commensality and marriage that indicated that caste consciousness was salient for a number of households. At the same time, these practices were constantly being undermined by class and occupational status, education and elopements. A preoccupation with caste distinctions was reported as more prevalent amongst the older generation of residents rather than with the young.

Almost all the houses in Kampung Nehru (except for five) were individually owned (Rajoo 1985a). Neighbouring houses were occupied by families with agnatic and affinal ties. In another nearby Indian settlement (Dillon 1991), it was shown that kinship and friendship ties similarly played a significant role in the efforts of squatters to establish themselves in the locality. Over 44 percent of her sample size of 200 indicated that they obtained access to land for their houses from relatives or friends already in the settlement. Within the same settlement, distinct neighbourhoods were created and developed over time, each with its own character and support networks that had separate spheres of activity. For instance, religious affiliations formed a significant consideration of these networks but were also sustained in a manner that frequently saw minimal social interactions between Muslims and Hindus or Christians.

Kampung Nehru is a heterogeneous cluster of dwelling houses with varied building materials and construction styles. Unlike many houses in the neighbouring Malay settlement of Kampung Pinang which were built on low stilts, the dwelling houses in my fieldwork *kampung* were constructed at ground level. They were typically built with a combination of timber, plywood, bricks, and cement blocks. For the roofs, corrugated

cement asbestos or zinc sheets were used which meant that during the hot afternoons, temperatures within the house would be uncomfortably high. Windows were a combination of glass louvers and wooden shutters with cross-wire meshing. For many, a sizeable proportion of building materials used were salvaged or recycled rather than purchased. Collected over months (and sometimes even years) from nearby construction sites and houses which have been recently demolished by local authorities, they minimised expenditure in the light of the transient and uncertain nature of their sojourn. Because of the long duration of unhindered settlement in Kampung Nehru, many residents had fashioned a modestly comfortable domestic setting through incremental efforts of renovation and extensions to the original building.

In Kampung Nehru, houses with two or three bedrooms for households ranging between three to eight persons were typical. When relatives and guests arrived to visit and stay, the living room would be temporarily converted into a spare bedroom for the male members of the household. Compared to brick houses, the interior partition walls were often thin and hardly sound-proof, offering minimal privacy for secret conversations or sexual activities. To the rear of the building were the kitchen-dining areas with a squatting flush toilet-bathroom tucked in a corner. Very few houses in the settlement had toilet sheds sited a short distance away from the house.

For a number of houses, a narrow veranda was normally built at the front. These verandas would have multiple purposes. In the early evenings, residents (particularly the elderly) favoured these spots to sit, gaze and converse or have their teas and snacks. In the absence of a veranda, a strategic place close to the front door in the living room became the alternative. When the rains appeared, the space under the veranda rafters were used as shelters for wet laundry. At night, they were converted into parking spaces for motorcycles. For higher ranking castes, the verandas have an additional function as liminal spaces where strangers are entertained until their specific status is clarified before they are allowed further into the domestic arena (Mearns 1986). Whilst most verandas in Kampung Nehru were simply built, it was significant that the house of Subramaniam and Letchumi was conspicuously untypical. Ornamental metal grills erected right up to the rafters not only conveyed a sense of a well-guarded home but also their upwardly mobile status within the *kampung*.

The interior decor of the houses varied according to the financial capabilities and

respective tastes of the individual residents. In some cases, a linoleum carpet was laid over cemented floors of the living rooms but more commonly, the floors were left bare.⁶ A typical household would have an array of basic furniture and cooking appliances. Additionally, for the financially better-off household items included a black-and-white or colour television, a video cassette recorder, and a refrigerator acquired either as second-hand items or through a hire purchase scheme. Much more ubiquitous were framed photographs of senior family members, married couples, and young children adorning the living room walls. Sacred pictures and calendars were also common. In a few houses, these items were additionally joined by emblems of personal achievement displayed in glass showcases or on top of television sets. They range from certificates of commendation from employers (a MNC factory or a fast food outlet) to championship trophies and medals won at football and athletics competitions.

However, instead of the ideal setting of a specially assigned *ullutu* for *puja*, a modest wall altar with a small framed picture of their family deity (*kuladeva*) or chosen favourite deity (*ishtadeva*) in the living room wall was the common practice. In the *kampung*, Ganesha and Murugan were the most frequently recurring Hindu deities found. Less commonly, some households would have a pantheon of *devas*. An unusual instance was the home of Krishna and Ratna where a Chinese deity popular with the business and trading community was also incorporated together with other Hindu *devas* on a slightly elevated platform wedged between the living room and kitchen area.⁷ Moreover, only a tiny minority of houses fitted the beneficent easterly orientation. Indeed, the overwhelming majority were haphazardly sited and faced all permutations of the cardinal directions to take advantage of a winding footpath, narrow road or islands of open space. Of varying sizes and shapes, these abodes resembled jigsaw pieces fitting into any available functionally shaped piece of land.

Despite this long list of non-fits with the ideal, what was particularly significant was the notion of vulnerable boundaries. When darkness fell, a time traditionally believed to be threatened by lurking spirits, ghosts and the glances of an inauspicious eye ("the evil eye") of the passer by, windows were frequently shut. In some cases, front doors were left slightly ajar in the early part of the evenings when the living room was occupied. Securing windows and doors in Kampung Nehru at night was not a routine exclusively tied to religious policing. They also acted as a bulwark against corporeal dangers. Youth gangs originating from outside the settlement frequently roamed around boisterously in the

neighbourhood with various paraphernalia of destruction - *parangs* (machete), bicycle chains, and metal rods - late at night. When rival gangs encountered one another along the footpaths, loud quarrels and scuffles often flared up, and the residents would be rudely woken. In the past, the *kampung*'s ill reputation as a nest for criminals and as a popular site for gang fights was so well known that taxi drivers were reluctant to transport their passengers into the locality. Most non-residents that I spoke to who have heard about the *kampung* were aware of its reputation as a notorious "black area". In an attempt to disrupt these clashes the police authorities periodically made surprise nocturnal raids. However, because of their strong-handed tactics and indiscriminate detention of any males (young and old) seen "loitering around" late at night, the police personnel were also regarded with some disdain by the residents. A number of residents thus expressed the feeling of being haplessly trapped between the contending but equally threatening agents of chaos and public order.⁸

The organic *kampung*

Valentine Daniel (1984:62ff) has suggested that in the Tamil cultural landscape there is a subtle conceptual differentiation between various words used to denote territorial space. Whilst the *ur* signifies current residence, the *conta ur* has the connotation of "one's real home" and the place where the soil is most compatible with oneself and with his ancestors' substances. The variables for a *ur*-person compatibility are numerous and include the type of *kunam* and *putti*⁹ substances of both the *ur* and the person, the flavour (*cuvai*) of the soil, and the type of the *ur* itself. Whilst the *ur* in the Tamil cultural map is person-centric and does not have a clearly delineated boundary line except for vulnerable points in the frontier, the *tecam* and *kiramam* are relatively context free, bounded, standard, universally accepted and constant spatial units determined by the government.

As far as I could ascertain, the word *ur* was strikingly absent in everyday discourse and designations. Instead, *kiramam* was used. For instance, it appeared in Tamil on temple signboards and on all its official stationery. But in my conversations with residents, the Malay word, *kampung* was recurrent. Even when conversing in Tamil amongst themselves, the word *kampung* frequently stood out. Linguistic borrowings or loan-words of this kind from the prevailing Malay culture in everyday discourse is not unusual because of the experience of being domiciled for decades away from their traditional Indian homeland. The word, *kampung*, itself has a wide range of meanings which denote the ambiguity of

boundaries and the continuum between an individual house, the compound and the community at large (Carsten 1997:161f). In addition, the word has also acquired political and administrative connotations since the colonial era. In everyday conversational usage there are implicit meanings of an ancestral abode in contradistinction to a current place of domicile as suggested by the distinction between the query, "*mana kampung?*" (where is your *kampung*?) and "*mana tinggal?*" (where do you stay?). In other words, the notion of a *kampung* as a specific locality and as a place of origin has family resemblances with the Tamil concept of *conta ur*.

In Kampung Nehru, residents spoke variedly about their attachments to and evaluations of the locality. The sentiments expressed were dependent on the length of tenure, kind of emotional investment in the *kampung*, and on their economic status. More recent arrivals generally tended to be ambivalent viewing the troubled aspects of the *kampung* as something undesirable but beyond their immediate control. Many espoused the view that it is better to be aloof from local affairs for the sake of one's well-being. As a young man succinctly put it, "One should close one's eyes and ears to what is going on, and just concentrate on working hard in the factory". Even those who had resided for longer periods in Kampung Nehru had various ways of indexing their sense of dissatisfaction with the present. A few spoke emotively of the disunity and impersonality of the settlement without giving specific details. Some juxtaposed Kampung Nehru with another locale and made their evaluations in terms of a lack. For instance, one disgruntled woman resident suggested to me that curry leaves grown in Kampung Nehru have an inferior quality to those from her home state.

Others reminisced nostalgically about a more idyllic community life before the "troubles" began. There was a sense of achievement and pride of having weathered the initial difficult material circumstances through sheer determination and good fortune. Life in the plantations was described as relatively far more difficult and unfulfilling than life in the city. Despite the diverse origins of residents in the *kampung*, temple leaders spoke of having created and fostered a semblance of a traditional Indian village community against all the odds.

At a cursory glance, it could be argued that these sentiments are apparently self-evident as suggested by the name of the *kampung* which bears a similarity to an illustrious Indian political leader. However, this was also open to contestation and varied recounting.

For instance, when I first queried Ravi, the problematic *ketua kampung*, as to the reasons for "Nehru", he declared that it was a collectively conscious expression of the residents' hopes for a harmonious, vibrant and prosperous community. But Bala, a temple leader, made little of this. Instead he offered a much more modest explanation: the *kampung* took the name of its founding settler. This too was disputed by an elderly woman who had lived in Kampung Nehru for nearly 20 years before moving out to a neighbouring modern housing estate. Despite the attempted homology between the *kampung* and the illustrious Indian politician, she mocked the embarrassing disparity between the ideal and the reality. "It would be better for the *kampung* to be demolished as soon as possible in order to remove this blot".

Narratives explaining the decline of the *kampung* as a cohesive community typically refer to the advent of troublesome "outsiders". When Kampung Nehru was being created in terms of a self-ascribed name and the formation of a Settlement Committee, Subramaniam was in his late teens. For him, the construction of a *kovil* replacing the small Muniswaran shrine around this period was a prominent landmark in the history of the *kampung*. A well-known Tamil adage commends the setting up of a *kovil* in order to make a place habitable, and obversely counsels avoiding settlements where there are none. In this context, constructing a Mariyamman *kovil* was akin to elevating her to become a village deity (*gramadevata*). Together with his cohort of male friends, Subramaniam helped to construct the *vimana* ("tower") of the *kovil*, an activity that he recounted with evident pride. Rendering services to the *kovil* in this way, he ventured to observe, was a feature that seemed to be absent in many present-day youths. Whilst he conceded that they were typically interested in things which "any boys are at this age", they were also qualitatively different from them. The Indian youths of today, in comparison, were lamented as lacking a knowledge of Tamil culture and Hinduism. Their crass attitudes towards young unmarried women, their general disrespect for elders, and their involvement with drug and alcohol abuse typified their loss of moral and cultural bearings. In Kampung Nehru, Subramaniam specifically traced this decay as commencing from the late 1970s with the in-migration of "troublesome" Indians from a different region into the *kampung*. Because these new settlers tended to disregard the delicately woven social fabric of the *kampung* and insisted on their own disruptive ways of doing things, squabbles and fist fights often arose between them. In many instances, they were sparked off when female household members were spoken to in a suggestive manner by these newcomers.

As elaborated elsewhere, another dimension to the conflictual and fragmented aspect of the *kampung* can also be attributed to local-level political competition for limited resources. Indeed, knowledge of this "social fact" was not disavowed amongst the residents themselves although the particular slant of their narratives depended on their respective positions within this drama. Following Bourdieu's notion of the linguistic market, I would suggest that as these aspiring leaders sought to convince a local clientele of their efficacy through the promise of material benefits, they have also to engage with the symbolic currency prevalent in the political sphere. To persuade higher echelon MIC politicians that they were worthy of political investment, local leaders represented the *kampung* in terms of a perceived "essence". Progressively, the local life-worlds of the *kampung* became entangled and implicated more closely with the shifting processes of urbanism, ethnicised patronage, and property redevelopment. However, it would be mistaken to reduce the varied kinds of daily negotiations to merely a political dimension. Individual residents also laboured to expand their personal spaces, spheres of influence or act together to secure shared benefits along mutually recognisable lines. These negotiations showed themselves in varied ways as the following paragraphs will suggest.

Kampung Nehru is spatially divided into two unequal halves by Jalan Besar. One portion is populated by more Tamil Hindu residents whilst the other smaller half has a higher proportion of Tamil Catholics and Muslims. The Hindu side is less congested and has a greater sense of a "lived-in" ambience with the planting of various ornamental flowering shrubs, herbal bushes and shady fruit trees around the houses. These flora served multiple functions. Not only did they provide ingredients and elements for Indian cooking, bodily ornaments and *puja*, they marked out as well approximate boundaries and displayed their respective owners' longevity of tenure in the settlement. Under these cramped conditions, perimeter fencing around the houses was almost non-existent. The only exception was the row of houses adjacent to the Mariyamman *kovil* which had wooden and chain linked fencing. But they were erected in a manner so as to be readily movable. Thus, whenever there were temple festivities, these structures were dislodged to create an enlarged clearing in front of the *kovil*.

For many years, residents relied on oil or kerosene lamps for lighting. Alternatively, some used car batteries for powering electrical appliances which involved more financial expenditure as they needed to be recharged from time to time. Bolder and more resourceful residents chose to tap illegally into the electrical power lines that ran

overhead across a portion of the *kampung* for domestic use. Later, a diesel-powered generator was set up by a resident who subsequently became the *ketua kampung*. For a monthly fee, electricity was supplied to households for a specified number of hours each night. Placed in such a strategic position, disgruntled residents related to me the extra leverage that this provided in entrenching his status as the leader of the *kampung*. Ironically, his hold on the settlement was progressively weakened when portions of Kampung Nehru became electrified through the national power grid as a result of general election promises being fulfilled.

The earliest water sources for the settlement were derived from wells dug deep into the sandy ground. As the number of inhabitants increased, the water table level dropped through constant use and residents had to ferry their water supplies from other *kampung* and strictly ration their daily use. Appeals to the local authorities subsequently provided some reprieve in the form of a network of communal water standpipes. Older women residents of Kampung Nehru remember having to queue up at the nearest standpipe a few times a day for their daily supplies of water.¹⁰ Alternatively, in various sections of the sprawling *kampung*, a mutually agreed time schedule was worked out whereby neighbouring houses were able to draw water from the standpipe via individual plastic hoses for a specified period each day.

As alluded to earlier, the spaces enveloping the houses are less manageable. Transposing a materialistic twist to Dumont's typology, they are dominated by the palpable religious forces of danger and pollution. Pollution in a squatter *kampung* can be particularly problematic. Because the local authorities did not provide drainage in the form of concrete drains (except along Jalan Besar), shallow surface ditches had been dug following closely the contours of the land and haphazard distribution of houses. During the drier seasons, these ditches were frequently clogged with stagnant putrid water. These same ditches are quickly transformed into fast-flowing riverines during heavy thunderstorms. If sections of the ditch are not assiduously maintained by their respective residents, its polluting contents of rubbish and debris would overflow from the ditches and be transported to homes further "downstream". In the past, tempers had flared and heated words exchanged. Unlike other settlements nearby which were sited on swampy grounds, Kampung Nehru rarely suffered from serious flooding. The danger is of a different kind and lay elsewhere. Houses built on sloping ground or along the banks of Sungei Pencala faced the perpetual threats of landslides or being swept away by powerful torrential currents during thunderstorms.¹¹

Defined as illegal settlements, these *kampung* are perpetually assaulted by a constant stream of stimuli necessitating various degrees of adaptation, improvisation and expansion. The threat of forced eviction from the locality and demolition of their homes by authorities form perhaps the most disruptive aspect of this daily drama. As the present laws require only a 30-days official notification with no provisions for arbitration, squatter residents are constantly alert for signs and rumours of imminent development. If residents voluntarily shift to other kinds of abode or to other localities, the vacant houses are quickly rented or sold and reoccupied. Residents also laboured to make their houses as comfortable as possible whenever finances permitted. Akin to the notion suggested by Daniel, these houses are manifestly "organic" in that they are extended or renovated to suit changing household circumstances. Throughout the period of my fieldwork, it was common to witness some kind of small-scale construction in progress. Even for Kampung Nehru which was close to being demolished, this activity never entirely ceased.

Erasing a *kampung*

For a number of years there had been rumours and gnawing suspicions of the demolition of Kampung Nehru and its neighbouring settlements. Many other *kampung* along Jalan Kelang Lama nearer to Kuala Lumpur had made way for housing and commercial development. It seemed inevitable that these changes would eventually reach Kampung Nehru. This prescience was confirmed one day with the sudden appearance of *orang luar* ("outsiders") employed by the developer to perform a "levelling and contour survey" of the locality. Periodically, other "outsiders" would come into the *kampung* to ask questions and make copious notes. Eventually, an official letter was received by the residents. The affected houses had their front walls marked with a large ominous 'X'.

Arguably, the specific geographical location and the size of the numerous settlements had provided a lengthy reprieve from interference. When the Federal Territory (incorporating Kuala Lumpur) was carved out of the state of Selangor in 1974 to become an autonomous self-governing entity, administrative boundaries were redrawn to accommodate the districts of Gombak, Hulu Langat, Klang and Petaling. On the municipality map, this cluster of settlements is situated close to the boundaries between two administrative areas and to the Federal Territory border. In a study of another Indian squatter settlement nearby, Dillon (1991) reported that the surveillance and demolition of squatter houses were comparatively more intense on the Federal Territory side given their

faster growth and the greater resources available. To stave off eviction, squatter residents sometimes turn to the ruling political parties to act as intermediaries with the developers and authorities. More frequently, however, squatters succumbed to or resorted to giving *wang kopi* (literally, "coffee money") as inducements to City Hall enforcement officers but this did not always guarantee that eviction would be avoided.¹² In the case of Kampung Nehru (and its neighbouring settlements), its administrative liminality and legal status as "state land" granted it a veneer of unintended protection. As an employee of the housing company suggested, these squatters are sitting on "no-man's land" which made bureaucratic administration and planning approvals problematic. However, this is an anomaly that would be ironed out in the near future with a proposed redelineation and restructuring exercise under way.¹³

Another probable reason for the lengthy reprieve can be sought in the realm of suburban aesthetics. As an area zoned for industrial use, the surrounding built landscape is dominated by giant chimneys and monolithic factory buildings. A great number of these factories emit noise and pungent smells at all hours of the day. Developers presumed that there would not be a ready market for a middle-class residential estate built in this kind of locality. However, with the upturn of the urban economy and a steady demand for house ownership, hesitancy has been transformed into business audacity. As the existing stock of prized land closer to Kuala Lumpur neared exhaustion, enterprising developers and investors looked more favourably at encumbered land for redevelopment.¹⁴ Moreover, pressured by its own discourse of achieving housing targets as stipulated in the Five-Year Malaysian Plans, the government also opted for selling off or jointly developing "state land" with selected private housing companies. Previously sited on relatively safe havens, squatters on "state land" now find themselves drawn into the juggernaut of land speculation and forced evictions an inevitable fate. Kampung Nehru is a typical settlement along the economically rejuvenated stretch of Jalan Kelang Lama radically affected by these changes.

Spread over a total land area of about 160 acres, this configuration of settlements is earmarked to be replaced with an estimated 5,000 units of medium and low-cost high rise flats with the statutory provisions for four-storey shops, petrol stations, places of worship, a school, a clinic and other public amenities. In keeping with the industrial zoning requirements for this vicinity, a strip of land fronting Jalan Kelang Lama is set aside for semi-detached factory buildings. Further inside, the portion facing the *tasik* is to be

refashioned to accommodate a club house with water recreational sports (like boating, water skiing and windsurfing) offered as attractive inducements for future residents. But for the present occupants, this kind of information is privileged knowledge. One has to rely on *kedai makan* talk and rumours for partial enlightenment. Only prospective purchasers and investors, and those residents who bother to make a trip down to the developer's office in the heart of Kuala Lumpur business centre have an inkling of the details of the scheme.

At the early stages, the developer had also strategically drawn into the negotiation process the respective *ketua* of each *kampung* to help decide who would be eligible for compensation in the form of discount prices for low-cost units. In Kampung Nehru, there were suggestions that the residents' interests were not safeguarded by their *ketua kampung*. Although many responded to my queries with vaguely phrased answers, there were a few who made vehement allegations of favouritism, corruption and nonchalance towards their plight.¹⁵ Although this could be summarily viewed as a typical case of local-level patronage politics, these allegations were complicated by a traumatic incident. In the early 1980s, factional struggles had escalated into physical violence and a *kampung* youth was killed (for details, see Rajoo 1985a). Despite the thick cloak of secrecy guarding the key personalities involved, the force of the incident nonetheless continued to palpably exert its presence in the everyday relationships of the residents. For many residents, it became a kind of psychological watershed for those who spoke around it. Bala, a temple committee member said one evening that "it has taken us nearly 12 years to build up something of what things were like before". "Before" was a time when there was a greater sense of a village community with invitations to homes to celebrate important life-cycle events, birthdays and weddings as well as MIC-sponsored events at the *kovil* and at the *balai raya* ("community hall"). "Now everybody is afraid of being close to one another". Because of its lack of use, the *balai raya* built at the height of *kampung* cohesiveness (for meetings, relief shelter and other purposes) had been rented out by the *ketua kampung* to a Chinese businessman. Similarly, the community-built badminton courts were left unused and a perpetual heap of rubbish bags lay strewn on the cement floors.

In this drama, Ravi's leadership standing in the community was ambivalent. Some residents were dismissive that he was audacious enough to introduce himself as the legitimate *ketua kampung*. Whilst his oratorical skills and political savvy were admired, they were also offset by his apparent lack of accountability to the *kampung*. His labours to cultivate a *periyar* ("big man") or *nambi* ("eminent person") aura through the prevailing

ethnicised political structure without paying careful attention to cultural idioms was also a point of contention. For instance, one resident related his disgust with Ravi's shabby dressing and discourteous manners. Even if the *ketua kampung* was in league with the powers-that-be, "he should not be so greedy...he must also get some benefits for the *kampung*". For others, not only was his leadership seriously under question but his moral and spiritual dispositions were viewed as suspect. In all the temple *pujas* and festivities celebrated during my fieldwork period Ravi was conspicuously absent.

Logistically, squatter settlements are not minor inconveniences. In comparison to uninhabited jungles, these settlements invoke the potential spectre of recalcitrant residents refusing to be relocated. Project time schedules can be thrown off course and profit margins can be adversely affected. At the developer's office, however, a veneer of professional optimism dismissed the possibility of any substantial delays. Indeed, it was impressed upon me that in an adjacent project, squatters were relocated without any major incidents. Ravi had specifically characterised the persons overseeing the project to be "extremely good hearted" (*banyak baik hati*). In stark contrast, a former resident of the *kampung* dismissed them as "smooth talkers" (*mulut licin*) with a chameleon-like ability to change their behaviour. "Before we moved out of the land, they were nice and very convincing but afterwards they quickly forgot what they have told us earlier and became very rough with us".

Condominiums, low-cost flats and the modern *kampung*

Studies of mass consumption normally depict modern capitalism as engendering a series of homogenised spaces existing in commodified time. Under these influences, both the individuality and the communal potential of spaces are undermined as they become objectified for consumption. Ironically, cultural authenticity becomes a paramount concern even as there is a spectacle of products and images that essentially camouflages and perverts reality (e.g., Baudrillard 1983, cf. Miller 1987). Whilst seemingly offering an ethos of choices, these artfully packaged choices are already largely pre-imagined. I suggest that a specific configuration of these processes come to the foreground in recent housing designs in urban Malaysia.

In modern housing developments, there are normally at least two kinds of blueprint plans prepared by the developers as a guide towards assessing the feasibility of

the project. One - "the contour plan" - translates and reduces a polysemic landscape and place into a map that primarily views it in terms of physical encumbrances. Existing rivers, streams, tracks, roads, houses and other physical features are meticulously plotted. In addition, the contour lines of the locality are factored in to give an approximation of how much earthwork might be necessary to achieve a relatively flat piece of land, regarded as the most ideal and uncomplicated for construction. A second representation revisualises the landscape in terms of a built environment based on a master plan of the entire district with zoning allocations (like commercial, industrial, residential, mixed or recreational) and density guidelines. Drawing from town planning traditions and practices inherited from Britain and Europe, this layout plan becomes a powerful instrument for a large scale remoulding of the local landscape, and for the injection of modernist norms of hygiene, architecture and aesthetics.¹⁶ Should the project be conceptualised and financed by the private sector, anticipated profit margins become an essential component of this feasibility study. Only when the project is deemed viable and sufficiently profitable is the regime of planning approvals, financing negotiations, and the marketing aspects then dealt with.

Architectural and town planning blueprints do not merely serve functional purposes like providing housing. They also embody certain spatial practices premised on an imagined and interventionist future which draw from and feed into modernist and nation-state ideals (e.g., see Holston 1989, Kemeny 1992, King 1990). With a set of instructions on the manner of effecting change, they aid the management and the stimulation of a desired kind of rationality and morality as embodied in built environment forms. This might include repatterning daily life, displaying social status, regulating real estate, and cultivating new kinds of urban aesthetics. These blueprints imbibe a view of history which is futuristic. A projected future is posited as the critical ground on which to evaluate the present. Various visual devices are used to simulate an idealised future reality without poverty, danger and dirt. This decontextualises the more mixed and contingent present as well as privileging the agency of certain social actors over and against others (e.g., the state authority, investors, or planners vis-à-vis local residents, workers and consumers). In order to negate the specificity of local contexts within a scenario of capitalist production, the gaze of the developer and planner thus engages in a double movement. The first, as suggested, is a phantasy of projected history, a temporal negation of a specific position in its signifying practice. The second is a feature of capitalist knowledge which distinguishes between the specific, practical knowledge and the universal, abstract principles upon which these practices are founded. The former is made relative to the

other, and never to be contemplated on the same level as the principle that necessitated it (Noyes 1992:222).

As mentioned, various tropes and visual aids are used to disseminate this imagery. Whilst this is largely absent for low-cost flats, on-site showrooms marketing the effective use of living spaces are commonplace for medium and high priced condominium projects, reflecting the exponential growth of the urban middling classes. In the past decade, "condominium living" has been aggressively marketed as the urban lifestyle of the future as a consequence of the developers' labours to optimise both the high demand for housing and the shrinking land bank in the Klang Valley. Most developments now include a swimming pool, recreational sports club, children's playground, and uniformed guards as part of paraphernalia of condominium lifestyles. In more upmarket condominiums, miniature golf courses pose as additional enticements.

For prospective buyers, a three dimensional miniature model of the scheme offers a glimpse into the developer's future. Miniature models are one of many visual devices deployed to allay the prospective purchaser's doubts and fears about high rise structures, and to transform them into a marketable desirability. As a tool for reframing a perspective of the future, *simulacra* (constructed images) are integral in this exercise. Typically, a panoptic view of the entire project is displayed in the form of a scaled-down model. These structures are further garnished with appropriately coloured miniature trees, bushes, streetlights, cars and even goal posts and swimming pools. Everything seems to be present except people and animals. This *simulacrum* is further reinforced with voyeuristic views of various apartment models complete with miniature furniture. The explanatory sub-texts are concise with the floor dimensions and sales prices artfully displayed. To further consolidate this experience of an utopian intimacy and familiarity, the prospective purchaser is taken on a tour to a fully equipped and furnished showroom apartment constructed of plywood and chipboard, but situated safely on the ground.

In a number of showrooms that I visited, what was striking was the extent of detailed attention given to representing and promoting commodities that associate "affluence" and "modernity" with material artefacts from the West - cottage-type windows, brass kitchen pots and pans, and so forth. But the specific ethnic preferences of the clientele is not disregarded by discerning developers. The labels for individual model designs might incorporate the relevant vernacular language, and in conversations with sales agents the

prospective purchasers are invited to fill cultural gaps with their respective imagination and personal preferences. For instance, the auspicious Chinese geomantic elements (e.g., the relative location of hills and rivers) of the housing development may be given emphasis. For those with less interest in these aspects, the proximity to various modern amenities like major ring roads and commercial landmarks (e.g., shopping malls and hyper markets) might take centre stage in the sales pitch. What is significantly underplayed are the less aesthetic dimensions of structural safety and spatial fixedness. The absence of land or the impossibility of future building extensions are relegated to an inconsequential footnote.

A competitive housing climate has also spawned bold innovative marketing strategies and slogans to accentuate the supposed differences between products. For instance, to entice the growing market of environmentally conscious, culturally sophisticated and urbane middle-class consumers, the trope of "green healthy living" figures prominently on advertising billboards and brochures. In some cases, the cosmopolitan attraction of city living is conflated and harmonised with a nostalgia about the countryside. This is particularly striking in one recent development aimed to appeal to a sizeable and growing urban Malay middle and upper class clientele. The marketing hype was packaged with an imagery that recalled the ambience of *kampung* life that was left behind. Significantly, the architectural features of this development were explicitly advertised as derived from the imaginative creations of a popular Malay cartoonist who characteristically interweaves his illustrations with autobiographical accounts of an idyllic life in the *kampung* in juxtaposition to the impersonality of the city. This project was depicted as having "*kampung* features [which] include a swimming pool designed as a traditional water hole, orchards and even a community vegetable patch". Moreover, each unit is situated in a low or medium rise condominium block and is "fully equipped with modern conveniences within a warm, rustic *kampung* decor".¹⁷

In contrast to earlier government efforts aimed at modernising the "culturally backward" rural spaces, there is currently a growing trend to preserve and reify selected Malay folk traditions as the essence of country life. According to Kahn (1992), this has emerged because the discourse of a "traditional Malay culture" is imaginatively spun and consumed by Malay urbanites who maintain links with the *kampung* from whence they originated, and to which they return occasionally to visit their elderly kin. On a wider scale, the Malay *kampung* is held up as a nostalgic reservoir of national virtue and tradition amenable to both the consumption of locals and foreign tourists. An imagined continuity

with past ways of living provides a mooring point from which to think and talk about modernity and the future.¹⁸

Varieties of discontent and resistance

Despite the planning authorities' attempt to make high-rise housing the norm,¹⁹ these developments have not necessarily been enthusiastically embraced. In this section, I will relate three instances of "resistances" that I came across during fieldwork.

In a widely publicised case, an unsuccessful attempt was made by residents in PJ to obtain a legal injunction against the construction of a high-rise condominium situated adjacent to their bungalows. The plaintiffs alleged that the massive overhead crane posed a life-endangering threat. However, the judge adjudicated that it would be inappropriate to stop construction at this late stage, and that an injunction should have been sought much earlier. Catalysed by the implications of this incident and similar developments elsewhere, a number of resident associations and various other interest groups in the PJ area voiced eloquently their dissatisfactions and objections with the *Draft Structure Plan for PJ and part of Klang District 1988-2010* (launched in June 1994) that indicated a trend towards high-rise development. Many were long standing residents wary of the anticipated disruptions to their accustomed serenity, daily routines and property prices should the proposed redevelopment and the route of the Light Rail Transit (LRT) projects be allowed to materialise.²⁰ Pressured by the articulateness and cohesiveness of these disparate middle class groups, the planners were forced to hold "consultative talks".²¹

Nearing the end of fieldwork, I was introduced to another group of "squatters" who were untypical in terms of resistance against forced eviction. Although few in numbers, they were comparatively well-organised, and stood in strong contrast to the activities of the residents in my own fieldwork site. On a scorching Sunday morning, I attended a "press conference" called by residents of Kampung Cuabadak Tambahan, a Malay settlement situated near to the centre of Kuala Lumpur city. The site of the conference itself brought together eloquent juxtapositions. A large tent had been set up over the remains of a demolished house, and in place of chairs plastic mats were placed on the cracked cement floor. A few metre's away, an overhead crane was at work ferrying huge prefabricated rectangular housing blocks that throughout the conference audibly reminded those present of the pressing issue at hand. Surrounding the conference site were

wooden planks, corrugated zinc roofing, and other similar materials recycled into sign boards for large hand-painted slogans. Even the cladding used to block off the development site from the reduced *kampung* was conscripted for this purpose (see Plates 15 and 16). Whilst terse, the pleas and invectives inscribed were unmistakably clear.

Jangan robohkan istana kami ("Don't destroy our palace"); *Projek bukan murni* ("The project is not pure"); *Jangan ganggu kampung ini, tanah tumpah darah kami* ("Don't disturb this village, the land is our birthplace"); *Kami warganegara Malaysia menuntut hak yang adil* ("We are Malaysians seeking our just rights"); *Kami dianaktirikan dalam kemelut pembangunan* ("We have been tricked by the development fever"); *Pemimpin-pemimpin UMNO tidak prihatin nasib rakyat miskin* ("The leaders of UMNO do not care for poor people").

The conference started with a viewing of a video recording of segments of a police raid two weeks before. A troupe of riot police together with an Alsation dog had descended onto the settlement, and detained men, women and children in a lock-up for a few days. According to the women residents, this show of crude force ensued after a few male detectives had been successfully repelled earlier in the afternoon whilst their men folk were away at work. It was alleged that one of them had even displayed his genitalia, and made lewd and threatening remarks. Members of a few NGOs involved with the *kampung* had been alerted after the first encounter and they arrived in time to intervene unsuccessfully. A portion of the police raid was videotaped and subsequently used as documentary evidence at the press conference.

Kampung Cuabadak Tambahan is one of many long-established Malay and Indian settlements within the locality known as Sentul. The origins of Sentul itself is traceable to the turn of the century as the site of a railway workshop, and thousands of barrack-like living quarters built for a predominantly Indian workforce. Numerous other *kampung* had also sprung up on the marshy ground and jungle surrounding these housing quarters. Despite significant demographic changes over the last decade, its image as a lowly working-class Indian enclave still persists. More recently, because the locality is one of the few remaining parcels of prized land within the city, a process of "urban redevelopment" has been set in motion.

Whilst most residents of Kampung Cuabadak Tambahan had acceded to relocation, a group of families occupying a corner of the sprawling redevelopment site had decided to stand their ground. An application was made to the High Court for rightful possession of the land as it was contended that various political dignitaries in the past, including a

former Chief Minister of the state, had promised legal tenure. Despite the court proceedings, the developers had proceeded with their piling and construction work in early 1994. An overhead crane and piling equipment were erected almost adjacent to the houses. In response, residents filed at least two complaints to the police listing noise and air pollution in addition to the life-endangering possibilities posed to them. As feared, on one such occasion, a 4 month-old infant with "a hole-in-the-heart" was rushed to the clinic because of an anxiety attack aggravated by the incessant piling.²² These attempts to enlist the intervention of the police authorities, however, met with an unsympathetic response. And so did a meeting with the local Member of Parliament (MP) who had instead advised the residents to make way for the sake of "progress" and "development". Subsequently, it was revealed that the said MP had a significant business stake in a consortium involved in the multi-billion *ringgit* project that envisages the construction of high-rise condominiums and a recreational complex. The residents also related how they had been faced with a perpetual barrage of harassment tactics. Verbal threats that their homes would be razed to the ground were issued by *samsengs* ("thugs") allegedly hired by the developers. What stunned the residents even more was that whilst in some of these incidents police detectives were present they did not nonetheless see fit to intervene.

Jawatankuasa Sokongan Peneroka Bandar (JSPB or "Urban Pioneers Support Group") is one of a few local NGOs set up to specifically address the plight of squatters. Officially established in the early 1990s after successfully intervening in assisting displaced estate workers receive adequate compensation and alternative housing, much of their energies revolve around informing "squatters" of their legal and human rights as citizens of the country. Unlike the current approaches of the dominant and opposition political parties, JSPB adopts a "community-organising" (CO) approach to addressing these dilemmas. Squatter residents are encouraged not to accept passively the dictates of forced eviction but to negotiate as a collective voice with the relevant developers and authorities for a mutually amicable solution. Local committees formed at each *kampung* network with one another to share their experiences and disseminate relevant information. Eviction orders when served are subject to the intervention of the scrutiny of another NGO which specialises in providing legal advice.

JSPB also employs a tactical deconstruction and reframing of dominant imputed social identities in order to gain the moral high ground and to negotiate from the position of strength. Besides employing the language of "human rights" as a point of contention,

subjugated practices in the form of precolonial notions with regards to the appropriation of land are also retrieved. The labour of urban "squatters" is consciously compared to the pioneering spirit of ordinary people who "opened up" land (*meneroka tanah*) in establishing farms and human settlements decades ago. It is contended that much human toil and personal financial costs were involved in transforming jungles, swamps, exhausted mining lands, river banks, railway reserves, unused grave sites and so forth into hospitable and thriving human settlements and vegetable farms. To negate these kinds of investments by depicting "squatters" as "anti-development" if they refused to be resettled would be a gross misrepresentation of history. Indeed, the term "squatter" (*setinggan*) is put to question. To signify this inversion of the dominant notion of ownership through the privileging of title deeds, the term *peneroka bandar* ("urban settler") has been promoted as a more appropriate as a descriptive noun rather than the colonialist-capitalist derogatory term.²³ This approach also harkens to the principles of "adverse possession" and "equity" which predates the formulation of the *National Land Code* (1965). An "urban settler" should then be able to claim legal possession of the land if he has shown evidence of occupation for a certain number of years, and if the titled landowner has not actively exerted his rights.

The notion of *meneroka* has particular salience to many rural Malays who migrated to the city especially in the wake of the NEP. Many believed the verbal promises of politicians that the land on which their new *kampung* was founded would eventually become theirs. In many cases, large settlements were explicitly patronised by eminent politicians (as evident in the names of the *kampung*). In return for political support, basic and social amenities were provided. Thus, it is contended that with such a clear trail of official recognition for decades, the onus is on the prospective developer and authority to make the appropriate compensatory offers. Any forced eviction should be construed as unlawful and morally unjust.

Articulating the urban settlers' interests vis-à-vis the dictates of authorities and developers is not only confined to resisting forced eviction and educating the general public of these practices. An active intervention in the political decision-making process has also been advocated. In the run-up to the 1995 General Election, for instance, a few NGOs facilitated the drafting of an election manifesto which crystallised the settlers' specific demands with respect to housing and forced eviction. Candidates of all shades of the political spectrum canvassing for their votes were invited to sign a promissory declaration that they would be morally bound to make periodic reports on their efforts to secure the

points outlined in the manifesto should they win. In the press statement issued by four neighbouring *kampung*, it was argued that pursuant to Malaysia being a signatory to the United Nations Resolution on Forced Eviction (see Appendix 4), the prospective MP should give attention to the following:-

- * a permanent alternative housing in the Sentul and the surrounding areas, that is complete and satisfactory be given to the people. The construction of this alternative housing should be the first priority in the project to enable us to move into our houses immediately
- * just compensation that will correspond to the losses incurred for property, shifting expenses and mental anxiety caused during the whole process
- * ...all negotiations between the people and the concerned developer are conducted in a proper manner
- * authorities like the City Hall, Police and others should not interfere at any time by using the relevant Acts and Ordinances...[and] a repeal of laws such as the *Land Acquisition Act 1960 (Amendment 1991)*,²⁴ the *National Land Code 1965*, the *Emergency Ordinance 1969*, the *Internal Security Act 1960* and the *Criminal Procedure Code 1976*, that allows forceful eviction and demolition and arrest that are threatening in nature (Source: "Tuntutan Peneroka Bandar kepada calon pilihanraya" pamphlet)

For various NGOs, the pedagogical process of "empowerment" is regarded just as crucial as the desired product of negotiations. Whilst the specificity of the process might differ according to the preferences of each respective NGO, they nevertheless share a common ethos. An alternative and oppositional identity is characteristically forged by contesting the ideological, psychological and moral high ground of the "powerful" disseminated through an officially sanctioned mass media. "Urban settlers" - and other subalterns like factory workers, indigenous groups, and farmers - are introduced to the skills of group negotiation, of monitoring and analysing the relevant data, and of mapping and displaying the complex power relationships through poster displays, cartooning, street drama, role-playing and other "popular media" forms. An important part of the reskilling process involves "emotional work" as well. In the event of the traumas of forced eviction, mock demonstrations and confrontations are staged, and video-tapings of evictions elsewhere are screened to highlight the avenues of aggression that might be adopted by developers and authorities.

In contrast to the robust anti-eviction efforts waged by the residents of Kampung Cuabadak Tambahan, the responses in Kampung Nehru were comparatively muted, diffuse and mixed. One evening, I decided to show Subramaniam, a key leader in the

kampung, a copy of the developer's layout plan that I managed to procure earlier (see Plate 7). Subramaniam was visibly caught up by the panorama of the plan, and he spent a few minutes making sense of it before we went on to discuss what the project might mean for the future of the *kampung*. As Subramaniam the businessman, he seemed detached and reasoned that "progress" and "development" were inevitable modern processes. Nevertheless, he was dissatisfied with the manner in which residents individually sought compensation and worked out the allocation of their respective flats. A single lawyer could have been hired to represent all of them to save costs and present a united front. But when Subramaniam assumed the persona of the treasurer-leader of the Mariyamman *kovil*, he became much more agitated in his views. He spoke of his tireless efforts to convince the temple committee towards adopting modern management methods of accountability, and to get more young people involved in the activities of the *kovil*. In juxtaposition to "tradition", Subramaniam contended that "Indians must modernise if we want to get ahead. It is no use believing and following strictly traditions and customs from India. We are in Malaysia now".

Moreover, a new impetus was required to dislodge the residents' present apathetic attitudes regarding the future of the *kovil*. He complained about the lax and irregular payments towards temple subscriptions, and the absence of any urgency towards detailed planning for a bigger *kovil* in the future. Indeed, Subramaniam pointed out to me (on more than one occasion) that if he had not doggedly and on his own initiative investigated further Ravi's claims that the developer would not be able to provide an alternative temple site upon redevelopment, there would not have been a subsequent promise of a piece of land for the Mariyamman *kovil*. The developer's preference had been to amalgamate all the individual shrines and *kovil* in the locality into one main site, a proposal to which Subramaniam had strongly objected. "The *kovil* on the other side of the river is different from ours. How can we worship together?". An official letter was proudly shown to me as evidence of his successful intervention. Even after his triumph for the Mariyamman *kovil*, Subramaniam said that he had from time to time been approached to drop this claim with monetary inducements.

Letchumi, his wife, was in the same room with us that evening. Although she was a largely silent listener to our many conversations, Letchumi made an intervention on that occasion. She was not impressed with the plans, and was baffled about the safety of these high structures since the ground was made up of unstable tin tailings. To underline her

observation, she made reference to a recent unprecedented event - the collapse of the upmarket 18-storey Highland Tower Condominium in December 1993 in which 48 lives were lost. "It is not right that developers think more about making plenty of money rather than the safety of the residents".

However, these kinds of objections were not equally shared by other residents. For instance, teenagers and young working adults of Kampung Nehru generally felt that it would be more advantageous to live in "modern" structures with legal tenure and distance oneself from the lowly public images of the "squatter". This was repeatedly underscored in my initial conversations with younger, second generation squatter residents. One of the most recurring questions posed to me was in terms of origins - "where are you from?" (*dari mana?*). Although this query is common etiquette, what was more unusual was the ensuing question of whether I stayed "in a wooden house or in a brick house" (*awak tinggal di rumah papan atau rumah batu?*). In a similar vein, in my earliest conversations with Ravi about the possibility of residing within the settlement, he had thought that I was only prepared to stay in a *rumah batu* in the adjacent Taman Berjaya. When I stated otherwise, he was puzzled but subsequently explained that this would be highly unlikely since eviction was imminent.

Elderly residents, by contrast, tended to have a different criterion for evaluating social changes. They exhibited a greater feeling of attachment to and emotional investment in the locality. Some expressed a sense of achievement of gradually transforming a hostile environment into a habitable place. Sometimes, these feelings were expressed obliquely in terms of an anticipated apprehension about living away from the ground. "Living in the sky" would not only mean that there would be a strenuous chore for them to climb the stairs daily, but also a radical change to their habits of sociality. Others felt that the prospective spaces within a low-cost flat would be noisy, confining and not conducive to the growing of flowering plants and herbs useful for cooking and for *puja*. A few even couched their reluctance to move in terms of a rumour that the inside walls of the low-cost flats were only built up halfway by the developers, and that residents were required to spend their own money to complete them.

As far as the future site of the Mariyamman *kovil* in Kampung Nehru is concerned, Subramaniam was content that at least this has been taken care of, and that there would be some kind of continuity in the life of Kampung Nehru even if its spatial entity would be a

thing of the past. Indeed, he felt that the future site at a bend of Sungei Penchala was particularly suitable for temple requirements. There would be a possibility of some cultivation of fruit trees on land beneath the transmission lines and pylons. What had to be attended soon was to start a pledging system towards a building fund for the new temple structure.

At the end of April 1995, a number of houses and the guardian shrine of Mariyamman *kovil* along the portion fronting Jalan Kelang Lama were bulldozed and a number of residents relocated to the new flats (see Plates 1 and 5). More as an immediate response to a managerial oversight rather than a carefully planned collective protest, some residents refused to leave their houses because keys to their new flats had not been provided. Until this was sorted out, the bulldozers had to return another day to complete their task. Speculations had been rife that these houses were supposed to have been demolished months earlier (in November 1994) but there was a period of reprieve until after the General Elections (eventually held in April 1995). In retrospect, some believed eviction was rescheduled to avoid undesirable complications and to curry votes for the status quo in the constituency. For now, the "heart" of Kampung Nehru remained intact. Both the *kovil* and the surrounding houses enveloping it would not be demolished for some time until the next phase of development began. Nevertheless, numerous inconveniences dotted the locality. Where there was easy access to the fishing pond before, there is now a chain-linked perimeter fence. Nearby, a high corrugated metal fence blocks off a view of Kampung Keretapi from the newly occupied flats. For pedestrians and motorcyclists alike, instead of a straightforward approach from Jalan Besar to the *kampung*, the high fence now necessitates a more circuitous journey.

NOTES

1. This is reflected in part by the contending poles of Louis Dumont's and McKim Marriott's elaborations on what is seen to constitute the fundamental ideological principle in the Indian caste system. Dumont suggested that the "caste system" is essentially an opposition between "pure" and "impure" categories drawing substantially from Emile Durkheim's profane-sacred dichotomy. Although ritual purity and pollution is an important aspect of Hindu beliefs and practices, Dumont has been criticised for not only being overly "structuralist" but also giving an exaggerated prominence to this dimension. Another approach typified by McKim Marriott and his associates is the "ethnosociology" project which ostensibly attempts to make mainstream anthropology more palatable to the "natives" by moving towards the interpretative subject and simultaneously divest the

anthropologist of his own folk symbolic constructs (Marriott 1989, 1977). The quest for a closer ethnographic fit between ethnographic reality and descriptive analysis is explicitly given a hermeneutical twist in the work of Valentine Daniel. To minimise the excesses of the above approaches, he favours a "conversation" between the fieldworker and the informant in which "the craft of anthropology requires that the fieldworker relax his symbolic constructs and to subject them to a process of disarticulation". When skilfully executed, the interpretative subject and the interpretative object are brought together into "partial coalescence" (Daniel 1984:47).

2. *Jati* is not only applied to human beings but to animals, plants, and even inorganic materials.

3. Ethnographic details for this synoptic account of the ideal Tamil house is derived from Beck 1976, Daniel 1984, and Mearns 1989. See also Moore 1989 for a contrasting approach.

4. *Peey* are the spirits of human beings who died prematurely or inauspiciously. Having been denied their full measure of life and happiness they roam the earth in search of humans against whom to vent their anger and frustrations. In the rural areas of Tamil Nadu, they are believed to reside outside the village but in the cities itself, they are ubiquitous although they are found concentrated near to trees, wells, cemeteries and railway tracks (see Moffatt 1979:241ff, Caplan 1989:56ff).

5. For contemporary descriptions of living conditions in plantations in Malaysia, see Jain 1970, Ramachandran 1994, and Wiebe and Mariappen 1978. An interesting semi-autobiographical account of plantation sub-culture can also be gleaned from Maniam 1993a, 1993b.

6. Footwear are customarily removed before entering the house.

7. There were "family resemblances" between the Hindu and Roman Catholic homes that I visited. In the case of the latter, it was a framed picture of a Caucasian-looking Jesus who guards the front door in addition to adorning the living room altar together with a crucifix and a candlestick.

8. As a conspicuous "outsider", I was particularly susceptible to speculations as to my real reasons for coming to the *kampung*. I had naively presumed that letters of introductions (in Tamil, Malay and English) from various academic institutions would grant me a veneer of safety and accessibility. In comparison to the adult residents, children and teenagers were less restrained in relating with the ethnographer.

9. *Kunam* are deep-level traits like particular qualities of mind and body which remain unchanged whilst *putti* are surface-level characteristics expressed through decisive consciousness.

10. By the early 1980s, about 20 water standpipes catering for about 350 households in the *kampung* was reported (Rajoo 1985a). Communal water standpipes are well-known sites of potential disagreements and quarrels.

11. In a number of similar settlements elsewhere, increased incidences of flash floods have been traced to large-scale building construction activities situated further upstream which have neglected to take precautionary measures (for instance, see 'Villagers blame builders for flash floods in the area', *The Star*, 22 December, 1994). Ironically, some politicians and developers have seized on these complaints by squatters as further proof that these

settlements need to be demolished in order to make way for redevelopment.

12. In my first meeting with Ravi, I was given his insights of the nature and extent of *wang kopi* in Malaysia. He viewed it as an undeniable facet of Malaysian life in which "everybody knows". But contrary to what people normally believe, he said that taking *wang kopi* is not confined to people "from below" but from the "head downwards" (*kepala kebawah*). As I was to find out later, Ravi himself was not above suspicion.

The extent of the problem can be inferred from the passing of a new *Workers Code of Ethics* (conduct and behaviour) in early 1995 by the Selangor state government. Based on the *General Orders for Public Servants 1993* (conduct and behaviour), all staff of local authorities in Selangor are forbidden from receiving gifts from the public. The staff are also barred from being involved in any contracts implemented by the local authorities, and undertaking outside jobs without permission from the council president (see 'Council staff cannot accept gifts', *The Star*, 9 March, 1995). Also see Gomez 1994 for an extensive discussion of the phenomenon of "money politics" in Malaysia.

13. 'Plan to redefine council boundaries in Petaling', *The Star*, 11 October, 1994.

14. See 'Living off the land', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 4 July, 1996 for an account of this approach to redevelopment.

15. Similarly, a few residents in the neighbouring settlement complained that they were deliberately left out of balloting for the same low-cost units ('Seven left out of balloting for flats', *The Star*, 1 March, 1995).

16. Recent software innovations like the Geographical Information Systems (GIS) allow "virtual reality" images of the future to be more detailedly mapped, created and manipulated. In the process they rework cultural codes and enhance further technologies of surveillance. For a recent discussion on the social implications of GIS, see Pickles 1995.

17. See '100m ringgit Kampung Warisan condo launched', *The Sun*, 4 December, 1994.

18. Both state and national level competitions for the "best traditional Malay village" are conducted every year. The *kampung* are judged on "cleanliness, health, beautification projects, economic activities, social activities and leadership, and public participation in local activities" (See 'Kampung Endah wins best village title again', *New Straits Times*, 22 October, 1994).

19. For example, see 'Highrise-living to be norm in city', *New Straits Times*, 28 February, 1995.

20. Regarding the LRT route in a section of PJ: "The value of our properties (too) will decrease as LRT will take away the quietness in the area"; "We have no objection to the project on the whole; the only thing we object to is having it in our midst as it will shatter the serenity of our lives"; "it would affect the quality of the environment by causing noise pollution" (see 'Residents upset over LRT route in area', *The Star*, 8 April, 1995).

21. See 'Hearing on objections to plan soon', *The Star*, 10 December, 1994; 'MP: Give three months to hear views', *The Star*, 27 December, 1994; 'Views to be included in final draft of plan', *The Star*, 17 February, 1995; 'Council to hold talks with resident groups', *The Star*, 28 February, 1995; 'Residents upset over LRT route in area', *The Star*, 8 April, 1995.

22. 'Demolition plan put on hold', *The Malay Mail*, 17 December, 1994; 'Six squatters seeking compensation', *The Star*, 19 December, 1994; 'Villagers want developers to remove crane', *The Star*, 24 January, 1995.

23. The rural sector is also not neglected. In early April, about 1,000 "urban settlers" and plantation workers gathered outside the Prime Minister's Department to hand over a memorandum together with 40,000 signed appeal cards. A Malay rubber tapper from Kedah said, "Although we tended the land and lived in the estates all our lives, most landowners just sell off their property and ask us to move. Where do we go when that is the only home we know?" (see *The Star*, 2 April, 1995).

24. The amendment to the *Land Acquisition Act* was severely criticised by detractors as allowing no legal redress for any land acquired for public use but which may later be converted for private development.

Chapter Five

LOCAL HINDU SPACES:

Parading community, status and power

In the study of religions, it is axiomatic to make an analytic distinction between "textual" and "popular" versions. In the former, sacred texts as well as mythological, philosophical and ritual elaborations of them are the principal focus of study. Whilst various enduring themes in these texts surface in the everyday lives of devotees, they do not necessarily accord with the same degree of importance or coherence that priests and scholars may give to them. Thus, in examining "popular" Hinduism, ethnographic evidence rather than textual exegesis is the key methodological approach. It has been further suggested that in order to make for a meaningful world, "textual" Hinduism is not passively received but involves a sense of creation and re-creation (Fuller 1992:7). Once again, human agency and subjectivity form the backdrop of these concerns. This approach necessarily implies an appreciation of the web of social relations in which Hindus are embedded. Preceding chapters of this thesis have sketched the structuring contexts both in historical and spatial terms in which Indian residents of Kampung Nehru find themselves. As a "squatter" settlement, the residents' sociality is circumscribed by an array of social images and constraints that do not arise for those in legally recognised domiciles. Furthermore, being stereotypically and collectively categorised as "Indians", residents are subjected to the ambiguities of an ascribed identity that draws its symbolic potency from the practice of an ethnicised patronage culture.

In this chapter, I examine how Hindu religious practices contribute towards constituting a sense of locality in the *kampung*. Following Appadurai (1995:204), a locality is a "complex phenomenological quality, constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity and the relativity of contexts". This inscription of locality onto bodies, or an embodying of the locality, is a social act involving the use and distribution of knowledge. To cite Appadurai again, "local knowledge is substantially about producing reliably local subjects as well as about producing reliably local neighbourhoods within which such subjects can be recognised and organised" (Ibid.:206). Moreover, I suggest that although the local *kovil* ("temple") is an autonomous site that embodies parochial histories and memories, it is also not an entity that stands in isolation in the Hindu religious landscape. Instead, it is integrally linked to the social

activities and self-representations of other *kovil* in the locality. Put differently, the activities and discourse in each site or setting are structured so that they are to some degree affected by experiences at other religious sites. They contribute towards a "public culture" of Hinduism (cf. Appadurai and Breckenridge 1988). Local religious leaders are thus also open to a pervasive didactic pressure to modify the practices of popular Hinduism towards rituals that approximate "Sanskritic" or "Agamic Hinduism" in a general trend to distance Hindus from the "lowly" and "orgiastic" images of the past. How these different elements intersect is shown through a discussion of the micropolitics of space as unfolded in the celebration of the annual goddess festival, the *thiruvila*. Although the *thiruvila* should be regarded as a temporal marker in a thread of Hindu special moments commemorated throughout a year, its centrality and significance is particularly evident in the large crowd of participants and spectators that attended this event. I do not, therefore, elaborate on a number of other ritual events - like the *Thai Ponggal*, *Navarattiri*, and an inaugural divine wedding ceremony - that were held. In describing the *thiruvila*, I wish to suggest that this festival not only allows personal needs and anxieties to be ritually addressed in the first instance, but also that its spatialised idioms are particularly apt for other signifying purposes which illustrates well the ambivalent position of working-class "Indians" in the national ethnoscape. Put differently, "everyday resistance", insofar as it exists, is historically and culturally mediated.

Worshipping Mariyamman in a squatter settlement

As noted in an earlier chapter, a large proportion of the migration waves of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries to British Malaya originated from the southern agrarian districts of India particularly Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu is the birthplace of two influential devotional movements connected with the worship of Siva and Visnu which, from approximately the seventh century onwards, have left an enduring imprint on Hindu culture. Extant literary texts reveal that over the centuries a flourishing South Indian civilisation had produced a distinctive Tamil world view as embodied in myths. These Tamil myths, nevertheless, are part of a wider world of Hindu mythology with prevailing evidence suggesting that much was appropriated from the northern Sanskritic tradition but with considerable adaptation and transformation in the process. Tamil myths then share a common pantheon with the classical Sanskrit *puranas* and with other regional literature in co-existence with local Tamil figures and deities in village cults and traditions. The deities of every major Tamil shrine will have both a local name and mythological history as well as

an entire complex of names, attributes, and myths derived from the northern, classical deities with whom they are identified (Shulman 1980:4f).

Mariyamman ("the goddess who changes") is one entity of an important category of "village goddesses" (*gramadevata*) popularly worshipped in South India as well as in diaspora Indian communities around the world. In the South Indian religious landscape, virtually every local settlement has its own tutelary goddess whose powers are preeminently related to localised boundaries. Mythologically, Mariyamman is a fallen form or manifestation of Parvati, cursed by her husband Siva to become a lower being due to an impure sexual thought on her part (Moffatt 1979:248f). Generally, she is characterised as an exclusively jealous guardian of her domain and fiercely protective of her inhabitants *vis-à-vis* the territorial jurisdiction of other *gramadevatas*. At the same time, her motherly attributes allow her to be directly approachable and amenable to ailing devotees. By accepting her *prasadam* ("leavings"), her worshippers express their equal subordination to the goddess, and receive the benefits of her equal protection over the territory they inhabit. But at the same time, these goddesses are translocal entities in so far as their names and characteristics are worshipped as tutelary deities for numerous other villages elsewhere. Thus, whilst there may be thousands of Mariyamman temples and shrines in the country, they can still be differentiated by locality, and are consequently regarded as distinct entities in their own right (Fuller 1992:43, Good 1985:119f).

"Village goddesses" are further viewed as largely ferocious and powerful divine beings only marginally under the control of humans. Especially when standing alone and without a male consort, they are said to be susceptible to being "hot" and much to be feared. During the hottest months between April and June, the goddesses' maleficent sides (their "low forms") are associated with much-dreaded epidemic diseases. Mariyamman, for instance, is believed to inflict smallpox on the inhabitants of her domain either to announce her presence or because she is displeased with ritual negligence. Smallpox is indeed viewed as a direct intrusion of the goddess into the body of her victim and she is manifested in the form of feverish heat. Various measures are subsequently employed to "cool down" the goddess, for example the application of "cooling" substances like water and *neem* (margosa) leaves to the victim and vicarious animal sacrifices, in order to effect her withdrawal (Fuller 1992:83ff). The obverse side of the relationship and the appropriate outcome of these ritual activities are the bringing of rain, the continued fertility of the land, good weather conditions for agriculture, and the general well-being of her inhabitants. The ambivalence

of Mariyamman and other deities like her has been described as embodying the abstract forces that underlie certain particularly feared and intractable forms of human misfortune (Beck 1976, cf. Babb 1975), and indeed it is her ambivalence and her "irrationality" which heightens her effectiveness in attending to the chaotic and unpredictable (Kinsley 1986:209).

In Kampung Nehru, the Mariyamman *kovil* is a modest sized brick and wooden structure built at the "heart" of the settlement. The temple has none of the major distinguishing architectural features or sculptures that are found in large and Sanskritic temples (e.g., *gopuram* or *mandapam*). Before the *kovil* was built about 20 years ago, a small shrine was sited near the base of a *vata* (banyan) tree.¹ This tree still stands at the rear portion of the temple. Because of the scarcity of land in the settlement whatever available spaces are fully utilised. Tucked to one side of the *kovil* is a small enclosed store room for ritual paraphernalia, and on the other side, a cage for coconuts and a shallow concrete water tank (*tirtha*) for ablutions (see Figure 1). Furthermore, there are modifications to sacral geomantic requirements given the protracted spatial growth of Kampung Nehru. In rural South India, Mariyamman and various "village goddesses" are normally sited in the "wilderness", that is outside the village boundaries and to the north of inhabited social space given the precarious forms of their powers (Good 1985). In Kampung Nehru, however, the Mariyamman *kovil* is surrounded by dwelling houses. Moreover, although Mariyamman should normally face the cardinal south, here together with the other deities in the *kovil* she has been reoriented to the east. The interior of the *kovil* is easily visible from the outside as the top half of the walls is fitted with cross-wire meshing. Inside, except for the *vahana* ("vehicle of the deity"), the absence of any furniture permits unfettered movements. The sacredness of the interior is further visually enhanced by *yantras* (auspicious designs) colourfully drawn on the floors and walls. Sketched on the ceiling are also stylised geometric patterns. An electric-powered flashing board depicting the iconic primal sound of creation, *Pranava Aum* (ॐ) with the words, *Aum Shakti*, inscribed below hangs prominently facing the entrance.

Like the dwelling houses, the cramped conditions enveloping the *kovil* necessitated various innovations. Senior residents pointed out to me that the temple grounds originally extended to a much larger area but had shrunk to its present compact size over the years with the pragmatic need for land to build houses on. For the moment, the *kovil* is surrounded by dwelling houses with no visible demarcation of boundaries. Only a small "clearing" to its front (facing the beneficent east) remained of its former expanse. When

required for festivities, additional space was created by residents displacing removable wooden fencing in front of their houses. This happened on at least two occasions during my fieldwork; for the annual *thiruvila* festivities and for an inaugural divine marriage ceremony. In the case of the former, a fire-pit was dug for the fire-walking ceremony, and for the latter, a pavilion for the deities and wedding guests.

Unlike established or Sanskritic temples, the daily *puja* did not require the presence of a Brahmin *kurrukkal* and temple musicians. A full-time *pujari* performed the bulk of the festivities but for the divine marriage ceremony, a *kurrukkal* was specially hired for the occasion.² Daily attendances at the *kovil* were small, and the *puja* was conducted in a relaxed ambience. Quite frequently, the *pujari* and his young male apprentice were the only ones present. They would be occasionally joined by individuals seeking special prayers before an undertaking or for difficult family and personal circumstances.³ On Friday evenings, a day considered particularly auspicious for *puja*, the number of devotees in the *kovil* significantly increased, averaging 20 to 30 persons. An overwhelming majority were women, female teenagers and children. As there was no strictly enforced temporal period for attending *puja*, devotees often trickled into the *kovil* even after the main *puja* (announced through chiming a bell) has been performed for their own prayers. After the main *puja*, children were frequently led in *bhajan* singing by an elderly man for about an hour whilst adults and teenagers sat on the floor to listen and converse.⁴ Alternatively, audio cassettes of Tamil devotional songs would be played over the public address system for about an hour or so. Physical movements within the *kovil* were generally unrestricted. Except for the area around the *vahana* and the deities, children were hardly discouraged from treating the interior of the temple as an extension of their playing area. Relatively few men attended *pujas* even on Fridays. Apart from the temple committee members (all men save one), those that came tended to be young males who had just finished schooling and were employed in factories or as office peons. Frequently, another prominent group of young men would be present but they remained outside the *kovil* at the edge of the "clearing". Congregating around their motorcycles, they chatted loudly in the night shadows until most of the female teenagers had left for home. The only occasions when the proportion of males increased significantly were during major festivals like the *thiruvila*.

As I have mentioned elsewhere, residents in the Kampung Nehru are living in the shadows of a troubled past. The drama tragically illustrates the substantial overlap between the political and religious domains of everyday life in the *kampung*. In India, patronising

and publicly participating in calendrical religious festivals have long been culturally valued markers, and recognised means of stating and affirming social positions and relationships (Appadurai 1981). Persons who occupy leadership positions in a Hindu temple or who take up prominent ritual roles during festivals are readily recognised as possessing emblems of prestige and honour. At the same time, they are also ideally expected to be generous as benefactors and display a civic "personalised social trust" (Mines 1994). Invariably, a certain degree of manoeuvring and negotiation is involved in cultivating this social symbiosis between the "mundane" and the "sacred". For those who are unsuccessful, a radical line of action might be pursued. Thus, some years ago when one of the faction leaders failed to secure coveted positions in both the Mariyamman *kovil* and MIC local branch, a substitute leadership role was forged in a neighbouring *kovil*. These entangled details, however, were never explicitly made known, let alone discussed with me. When I broached this subject with Subramaniam, his answers were always oblique and vague lest too much was disclosed to an "outsider". For instance, "what is the use of saying that 'I am giving hundreds or thousands of *ringgit* to this or that temple' when you cannot even give regularly to the temple in your own *kampung*?". Then again, "these people only come to attend the big festivals but they do not want to help make the temple better".

Moreover, in Kampung Nehru the official relationship between the Malaysian Hindu Sangam (MHS) and the temple leaders was minimal and indeed strained. According to Subramaniam, dealings with the MHS have been consciously avoided after an incident which was interpreted by the leaders as belittling their status and intentions. A few years ago, representatives of the MHS were invited to give a talk at the *kovil*. The much anticipated visit was given widespread publicity and a large crowd turned up on the appointed day. However, much to the embarrassment of the committee members, the representatives arrived exceedingly late. By then, a large proportion of the crowd had left in exasperation. Despite the excuse of being unexpectedly caught in a city traffic jam, this was dismissed as an unforgivable insult. Within the committee itself, there was a delicate tension between two principal positions. Younger leaders voiced the need to "modernise" temple life through greater accountability, discipline and long term management and planning of activities. The sentiments expressed in private were even strident - "inactive committee members must be purged and new, younger people included". Others, by contrast, counselled the wisdom of well-trodden paths and the need not to hastily rush into new untried ways. In one of these conversations, the "Great Wall of China" was offered by an elderly committee member as an analogy for the durability of traditional wisdom against

reformist arguments. To embrace modernity uncritically might mean opening the door to moral decay and corruption such as is evident in the West. Nevertheless, there was a general consensus that partisan politics should not influence or be integrally involved in what is regarded as strictly a local temple jurisdiction. This was not merely a philosophical insight but was also borne out of the divisive and painful experiences of the past. The intervention of the MIC political machinery was viewed as necessary in specific instances given the nature of patronage politics in the country. The MIC could help gain easier access to state resources or in shortcircuiting bureaucratic matters. It was a precarious balancing act that could not be avoided.

Colour and heat in the *thiruvila*

For many of the local residents, the *thiruvila* is the most significant and anticipated festive event of the year. There is a conjunction of ritual obligations, and personal and communal intentions. People spoke variedly of a renewed commitment to Mariyamman, of making special requests, honouring answered prayers, and of fostering a sense of community. At the individual level, the theme of votiveness was prominent - performing *kavadi* and participating in fire-walking was one visible expression of answered prayers or as a ritual precursor to them. The list of existential problems is diverse and dependent on the circumstances of the individual devotees - health and illness, important school examinations, family or personal crises, employment opportunities, business worries were the more frequently recurring ones. Saraswati, for instance, had participated in the *thiruvila* for four consecutive years ever since she was 14 years of age. She was able to cite different reasons for each year of her participation. This included seeking divine help in passing important nation-wide school examinations, peace and prosperity in her household, and of late for career guidance.

As a ritual occasion organised in honour of Mariyamman, the *thiruvila* is also a mythical collective space created for the goddess to manifest herself powerfully to her inhabitants. In South India, her special presence during this time has been described in spectacular terms - the "village goddess seems to erupt on the scene, to wake up from a state of quiescence to a state of frenzied activity. During an epidemic, or during her festival, which often coincides with an epidemic, the village goddess forces herself on the awareness of the villagers" (Brubaker 1978 cited in Kinsley 1986:204). Certain modifications to ritual performances, nonetheless, have been adopted under the pressure of reformist movements

in Malaysia. For instance, public animal blood sacrifices traditionally viewed as essential for invigorating her for her contests with demons which invade her village or, alternatively, for appeasing her wrath have ceased. And so has the practice of a devotee being suspended by hooks embedded in his back as part of heroic vows undertaken during the aroused state of this period. For now only the fire-walking ceremony persists.

For reasons not disclosed to me, however, the *thiruvila* had not always been routinely organised. I was told in cryptic terms that there was a period of neglect after the *kovil* was built but for the last consecutive 16 years the *thiruvila* has been successfully held annually. To organise a *thiruvila* on a moderate scale involves achieving a critical mass of persons, an aspect perhaps not possible until then. Moreover, the exigencies of urban living have necessitated various modifications. In plantations, the *thiruvila* could last up to 9 days but in the urban settings this has been reduced to 3 days and even celebrated over a weekend.

Given the spatial compactness of Kampung Nehru, the drama of the *thiruvila* also inevitably entered into the conscious spaces of Christian, Muslim, and Sikh residents living cheek-by-jowl with their Hindu neighbours. Whilst there were onlookers joining the crowd, some also took pains to avoid witnessing the events. A safe distance was fastidiously kept. This was confirmed by observant devotees themselves. For instance, a long-time resident remembered that in the distant past it was not uncommon for a few Malays to be present at the *thiruvila* but because of the renewed teachings of Islam as well as the policing activities of Muslim officials, this was not apparent any more. In other cases, distancing was self-imposed. A male teenager who after revealing to me that he was a member of the Pentecostalist Assembly of God Church commented with an obvious sense of achievement that despite having resided in the settlement for the last 15 years, he had never once witnessed much less participated in the festivities. When I asked why, he explained that "one must believe in only one god" as the belief in many gods is regarded as a deviational tactic of lesser spiritual beings to prevent the one true God from being reached. In his study of spiritual agency in South India, Caplan (1989:96ff) has observed that pentecostalist and charismatic Christian beliefs resonate with South Asian popular ideas on the aetiology of affliction. There are maleficent forces that attempt to deceive people by appearing in the guise of Hindu deities and demons, and "nominal" Christians as well as Hindus are vulnerable to such attacks. Moreover, it is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that "true believers" are able to overcome the agents of affliction, and accrue various gifts and

boons.

The efficacy of the *thiruvila* seemed to be problematic as well for another small group of youths and young men living in the *kampung*. Although they were present in all the major festivities during my fieldwork, they never once ventured into the *kovil* for *puja*. Instead, they congregated around their motorcycles to converse and watch from a distance. Commentaries on the moral fibre of the youths were frequent amongst residents. The high incidence of crime, gang fights, drug abuse, and general disrespect for elders were attributed to a host of factors - disciplinary neglect by their overworked parents, the ill effects of movies, television and videos, the trappings of urban Western-type atheistic materialism, and, the most vital of all, a weakening of their Indian identity and heritage. In turn, issues of identity were causally linked to the degree of fluency of the Tamil language and devotion to Hindu beliefs and practices.

In Kampung Nehru, it was Krishna, a part-time assistant *pujari* in his mid-30s who expounded to me an explicit programme of corrective action. He felt that the Mariyamman *kovil* could do more than just perform rituals and celebrate festivals. Like the activities of bigger temples, Tamil language tuition and religious classes could be provided for children and teenagers in the settlement. But Krishna was an enigmatic personality as well. Together with Ratna, his wife, they were relatively newcomers to the settlement having moved into their present abode some 8 years earlier. My overall impression judging from the conversations we had over the ensuing months was that he generally maintained a distant and detached aura about him. Over the years, he had acquired a working knowledge of some Hindu rites and *mantras* through attending religious retreats, reading manuals, and listening to audio cassettes. His household's celebration of domestic rites (e.g., *Thai Ponggal*) thus tended to be more elaborate than others. Krishna was also viewed with some circumspection by other residents, and this was partially reflected in the absence of unanimous support for his reformist ideas. For now, his efforts were fragmentary. During the *thiruvila*, for instance, a stall selling Hindu literature and various religious items (posters of deities, prayer beads, incense etc.) was set up. Two boys were conscripted by Krishna so as "to give them the experience of responsibility and the chance to practise their arithmetic".

Older males proved to be less pliable and willing recipients of Krishna's didacticism, and rare opportunities when they arose were seized by him. This was evident

during the afternoon recess before the *thiruvila* celebrations recommenced in the evening. Samy and his regular cohort of young men (aged between 20-22 years) were congregated in the shade of the "clearing" for tea and biscuits. As this was my first encounter with them, a number of biographical questions were raised and gradually our light-hearted conversation drifted towards the differences in our diets ("Chinese people are good at eating anything") and to exchanging summary opinions on the characteristic traits of Malay, Chinese and Indian women ("Malay women are the most modern").

When Krishna joined us, however, the ambience changed abruptly as he launched into a short impromptu monologue on Hinduism. To maintain the attention of his captive audience, a copiously illustrated book on Hinduism (published in California) was produced. Festivals like the *thiruvila*, Krishna stressed, provided opportunities for both the young and old to work together for the common good of the *kampung*. Unlike politically organised events sponsored by the MIC, they do not arouse ill-feelings or factions. A scientific analogy was specifically used to highlight the significance of the *thiruvila*. Like a car battery that needs periodic charging in order to be in an effective working condition, these festivals were necessary calendrical events for the "recharging" of the local landscape. His aptitude for scientific metaphors arose again in another instance in a discussion we had about the all-night *homa* ("sacrificial fire worship") that he had initiated a few months later. For this ceremony, he had managed to convince his Chinese employers of its efficacy and obtained monetary donations for the purchase of special woods, incense and ghee. The sacrifices made to the fire accompanied with the appropriate mantras, according to Krishna, acted like a "special fax machine which is able to convey to God our requests".

That June morning, the *thiruvila* attracted about 400 men, women and children. Apart from Kampung Nehru, others came from the neighbouring *kampung* and the low-cost flats across the river. The retinue of persons performing the *kavadi* ("ritual burden") comprised five men, six women and two young boys. The *kavadi* carriers wore either saffron coloured or white clothing. Two men shouldered arches with peacock feathers (*mayil kavadi*) whilst the rest carried *pal kavadi* (milk in metal pots) on their heads. An important aspect of the *thiruvila* involved these *kavadi* carriers and their supporters traversing a short route beginning from a guardian shrine situated at the northern sector of the settlement to the *kovil*, a geomantic movement that is mythically akin to the descent of Mariyamman onto the settlement (Good 1985). A major portion of the route was within the settlement itself but because of the spatial congestion of the dwelling houses it necessarily

involved traversing Jalan Besar for about 30 metres before turning back into the settlement and the temple (see Map 2 and Plate 12). The retinue was led by a rotund devotee possessed by Muniswaran, easily recognisable by his signature items of a sword and cigar. As the procession wound its way slowly through the narrow footpaths, devotees whose homes were being passed by stood patiently waiting with buckets of turmeric water to pour over the bodies of devotees to "cool" them down. In return, sacred ash (*vibhuti*) was placed on their palms or smeared on their foreheads by Muniswaran.

A continuous barrage of rhythmic music and shouts of "*vel, vel*" was chanted during the entire duration of the procession. Two specially hired temple musicians playing the *nadeswaren* (clarinet) and *davul* (drum) provided the backbone of the musical score. Additionally, a number of *kavadi* devotees had individual attention by family members singing *bhajans*, clinking together finger bells or beating on empty metal food bins as improvised drums. Bunching close to the devotees, they provided both visible and aural support (see Plate 11). For the most part, the *kavadi* devotees would walk and sway steadily but occasionally some would break into a short agitated jig. The music would flare up at this point and the retinue paused momentarily until the jig subsided before proceeding onwards. One particular young devotee bearing a *mayil kavadi* frequently held up the procession as he danced vigorously prompting one spectator to comment casually to me that he was probably "a first timer".⁵

Although aural fanfare was integral to the procession, there was also a discordant strand introduced by the exuberance of a small group of male teenagers who seemed more intent on merry-making than religious observances. Dressed in T-shirts, jeans and with some sporting "punk" hair styles, they stood in stark contrast to the yellow clothing of the devotees. With their own improvised drums and whistles, they tried to keep closely to the rhythms set by the temple musicians. But it was also evident that engrossed in their own excitement, they frequently disrupted the temple musicians' concentration. At one point during the procession, the temple musicians abruptly stopped playing, shrugged their shoulders in exasperation before commencing once again. Owing to the auspiciousness of the event, no words of reprimand were uttered and the group of volunteer musicians followed the retinue to the terminus of the procession, the fire pit.⁶

Although the distance traversed was only about 100 metres at most, the procession took slightly more than an hour to complete.⁷ By this time, all the vital ingredients that go

into a Hindu festival - "colour and heat" in Brenda Beck's memorable phrase (1969) - had palpably coincided. The blazing heat of the tropical mid-day sun and of the glowing embers, the packed crowd of sweaty spectators lined close to the pit, the fragrant smell of incense, and the loud rhythmic music of temple musicians thickened the atmosphere with drama, expectancy and excitement. Male attendants explained that they had spent the night before digging the pit, and had lit the logs some hours earlier. The presiding *pujari* was the first to walk across the fire pit paving the path, as it were, for the *kavadi* devotees to follow (see Plate 14). Before they did so, however, all were questioned for a few minutes by the *pujari* to see that they were ready for the feat. A spectator in response to my query remarked that it was to ascertain whether Mariyamman had sufficiently "descended" (*turun*) into them. Subsequently, two such adult devotees "failed" the test and they walked around the half circumference of the pit instead. Whilst fire-walking is viewed as an extraordinary feat that draws out a sense of awe at the protective power of Mariyamman over her devotees, this did not preclude an element of participative glee as well. Hesitant walkers were urged on with encouraging shouts and after each successful crossing, the crowd applauded and cheered loudly. Each devotee had a distinctive walking style and their degree of confidence was reflected in the manner in which they strolled nonchalantly or ran nervously across the pit, the former especially eliciting louder cheers. Of the retinue, only the two young boys were not "questioned" but led along the outer earth edges of the pit rather than through the centre. A couple of the successful *kavadi* devotees decided to walk across the pit a second time, additionally carrying on their shoulders young infants. All the male attendants were the last to cross the pit.

Compared to the preceding events, the closure of the fire-walking ritual was rather abrupt. When the last individuals had crossed the pit, jasmine petals were tossed into the pit before devotees and spectators alike helped to cover it up quickly with earth. Within a few minutes, the fire-pit had reverted to its previous condition with little traces of its former use. A free vegetarian lunch was provided shortly afterwards. For men, their allotted eating area was on a tarpaulin laid over the transformed pit, whilst women and children had their lunch on tables and chairs in a sheltered structure erected adjacent to the *kovil*. Whilst the large crowd was welcomed, one of the local leaders later privately commented to me that the promise of a nourishing feast is another attraction for devotees who seldom come for worship in the Mariyamman *kovil*. Significantly, the group of discordant male youths did not join in the meal. They stood on the periphery of the clearing, waiting for a sign to be invited to participate. Without any forthcoming they left

quietly not long afterwards. The festive atmosphere continued with a constant barrage of taped *bhajans* and announcements on the sale of coupons for *archanai* ("offerings"). Only about an hour after the end of the fire ceremony did the crowd begin to thin considerably. For now, Kampung Nehru was marked by a measure of regained composure until the festivities resumed later in the evening with the "chariot" or "car" (*ratham*) to be taken for a procession (*oorvalam*) around the locale.

Darshan, locality and rivalry

Preparations for the chariot procession in the evening unfolded at a leisurely pace, allowing people to rest, return home from work, bathe, dress, and recongregate at the temple grounds in readiness. When the proceedings began, the sun had set and the grounds were once again swollen with a crowd of people milling in the semi-darkness. After the evening *puja* was conducted, Krishna and another young assistant carefully cradled Mariyamman out of her niche, and with a gentle "rocking" motion circumambulated clockwise once around the temple preceded by a couple of musicians and a train of pubescent girls cupping oil lamps and flowers. Mariyamman was then placed onto the chariot, and securely fastened and garlanded with flowers. Because Mariyamman was to be taken around in public, her eyes and lips were cosmetically enhanced. Retrieved from a corner of the clearing a day earlier, the chariot was now brightly lit by a ring of bulbs electrically powered by a noisy petrol generator. Before the chariot procession set off, another *puja* was briefly performed in front of Mariyamman. Announcements over the public address system reminded devotees to bring their torchlights for the unlit areas of the settlements. As the chariot was pulled out of the "heart" of the settlement onto Jalan Besar by a group of young men, a train of colourfully costumed pubescent girls carrying a tray of flowers preceded the procession for a short distance. Moving systematically around from house to house were a couple of boisterous youths collecting monetary donations in cloth bags.

During the entire duration of the procession, there was much aural fanfare but male voices dominated the night air. In comparison to daily *puja* in the *kovil*, the active participation of young men and male teenagers came strikingly to the foreground during the chariot procession. They supplied excited comments and lively banter whilst women and children followed behind, relatively more subdued in their demeanour and conversations. Nonetheless, oral communication breaching the gender divide was rare.

Along Jalan Besar, teenagers acted as scouts walking slightly ahead of the chariot to shepherd the heavy vehicular traffic with relish. Drivers in buses, cars and motorcycles slowed their speed to a crawl to gaze at the procession of chariot and people. Off Jalan Besar in the narrow footpaths, the task of the scouts shifted to looking out for potholes, overhead electricity lines or tree branches that would disrupt the smooth journey of Mariyamman. Their observations would be echoed and relayed with gusto by other members of the procession. This apparent show of camaraderie and collective cooperation was further consolidated with a distribution and consumption of boiled chickpeas and carton drinks throughout the duration of the procession. Whilst a small number of the retinue eventually left for home after a couple of hours because they had to be up early for factory work the next morning, there was still a sizeable group remaining until the end of the procession.

At numerous points along the procession route, the chariot was brought to a momentary halt to receive the *archanai* of devotees. There was a sense of little haste and the procession unfolded at a leisurely and negotiated pace. A typical offering would consist of half a coconut, a bunch of bananas, jasmine petals, a small heap of turmeric powder, mango leaves, and burning josticks placed on a silver tray. Krishna - the presiding *pujari* for the night - broke off a portion of the bananas, lit a camphor cube and sprinkled some *vibhuti* onto the tray before reverentially waving the contents close to the face of Mariyamman in a deliberate clockwise motion. The contents were then returned to the devotee. Often infants were also offered up by their parents to be auspiciously viewed and blessed by the deity.

As is well-known to devotees, the religious *raison d'être* of the chariot procession is to allow the tutelary deity to view her domain. One of the residents expressed it as allowing "the chance for Mariyamman to see the neighbourhood and to drive away unwelcome spirits that may be found in trees and bushes". Just as importantly, her inhabitants are eager to receive *darshan* (Eck 1981) as the act of visual glancing during the *thiruvila* is considered particularly auspicious. In villages with more open spaces, planning the route of a religious procession could be a relatively uncomplicated affair. But volatile situations could arise in urban settings where there might be a promiscuous mix of ethnically segregated residential and commercial areas.⁸ The congested and mixed ethnic setting of mainly Malay-Muslims and Hindu-Indians in Kampung Nehru similarly entailed compromises and an element of risk. An overwhelming majority of the houses in the settlement are haphazardly built back-to-back with narrow ribbons of footpaths in between proscribing any unhindered

movement of the chariot. If widths were not the barrier, poorly maintained footpaths with large unnavigable potholes posed another logistical constraint. The route, by force of circumstances, then had to be circuitous and traversed stretches of Jalan Besar and Jalan Kelang Lama in order to reach houses which were in reality close together.

The routes of temple processions are seldom straightforward affairs, and involve a careful mapping of the spatial politics of the locale. For instance, Mines (1994:65f) has suggested that in urban India where the temple's domain often coincides with the constituencies of the local "big men" (*periyar*) or persons of eminence (*nambi*), an intrusion into another territory can be read as an act of aggression. But however well planned or orchestrated, a public procession is also an emotively charged event involving elements of unpredictability. It is a site where contending agents can strategically crystallise their opposing positions in visibly stark terms. Indeed, the past chariot processions of the Mariyamman *kovil* had been occasions where verbal taunts and fistfights had flared up with neighbouring Indian youth gangs. It was claimed that the chariot was illegitimately traversing through the domain of another *gramadevata*. Moreover, it was also common knowledge that youth gangs from afar often made use of these public processions as opportunities for merry making and mischief at the local *kampung*'s expense. In other words, ostensible contests over religious territoriality also merged with secular territorial disputes and statements of status between rival youth gangs. Whilst these kinds of situations could be preempted by a police escort (in addition to the mandatory police permit), residents also felt uneasy about this. Subsequent routes were changed or made shorter. Efforts were made to draw in the largest possible crowd for safety in numbers. Fortuitously, on the night of the procession a police chaperone did not appear. As the night wore on, the route of the chariot became more flexible as the leaders present negotiated where to go next. Subsequently, Mariyamman was taken on an extended tour up to the other end of Jalan Besar where other Indian settlements like Kampung Bengali were sited. This effectively meant that the entire length of Jalan Besar was traversed allowing the glittering chariot and joyous entourage to be open to maximum public viewing by non-Indian residents.

The following evening, a smaller scale procession was enacted. This time, the participants were mainly male teenagers and girls, and a handful of adult women led again by Krishnan. The ritual purpose was to allow Mariyamman to "cool down" and be "sent off" at the guardian shrine sited to the northern sector of the *kampung*. As the entourage

progressed slowly towards the shrine, a *kalasam* (pot) representing Mariyamman was brought from house to house to receive *archanai*. In comparison to the procession the day before, the ambience was much more relaxed and the participants, gleefully threw buckets of water, and smeared handfuls of vermilion and turmeric powder over one another regardless of whether "strangers" or not.⁹ One's presence was construed as implicit license for frolicking. There were family resemblances to the *Holi* festival as popularly practised in northern India where there is a recognised inversion of the normal social order through ritualised derision and mockery. Here, in Kampung Nehru, the participants were mainly confined to the younger generation and social interaction was localised. What was apparent, nevertheless, was the space momentarily created for relatively unrestrained physical contacts between the two sexes not normally possible during the rest of the year.

If the *thiruvila* helped to foster a sense of community through a shared religious activity, there was also an exclusionary dimension. Most significantly, the chariot procession avoided entering into Kampung Keretapi. To reiterate briefly, this *kampung* is a relatively recent and planned settlement created in the mid-1980s to accommodate about 400 households relocated to make way for a shopping mall. The residents were housed in rows of *rumah panjang* ("long houses"). A fairly large piece of land was also provided for the siting of the Gengai Amman *kovil*. Over the years, youth gangs from the two *kampung* had clashed on a number of occasions. As one of the youths described it with gestures to match, they were mostly *potong* ("cutting") fights in which knives and razor blades were used to inflict as much injury as possible to the opposing side. Families of the respective youths were subsequently drawn into the conflict leading to strained relationships between residents of the two *kampung*. As in Kampung Nehru, punitive police raids into the settlement were frequent, and residents expressed resentment towards the heavy-handed tactics of the police in indiscriminately rounding up various residents, young and old.

My tentative suggestions that the clashes were drug or alcohol related were dismissed as superficial or met with silence. At other times, rivalries over girlfriends or retaliations against verbal slurs were jokingly offered as motivating reasons. But the most arresting prognosis of what might be amiss between these two contrasting (and yet similar) settlements was offered through an analogy of the moral quality of houses. One morning, whilst showing photos of the *thiruvila* conducted the week before to a group of individuals (including a young trainee *pujari*) in the *kovil* of Kampung Keretapi, Lingam provided a suggestive lead. Although only in his late teens, Lingam embodied a confident

and articulate posture beyond his age. He has a small stake in his family electrical business along Jalan Besar and presented himself as an active committee member of the *kovil* as well. Emblematic of this status, Lingam conspicuously carried around with him a black daily planner and a pager. Some years previously, he had undergone an electrical training course in his home town before seeking his fortune in Kuala Lumpur. Because of his reputed skills in electrical gadgetry, Lingam had been responsible for the vital task of wiring up the chariot for the *thiruvila*. This was obviously a source of great pride for him. When our conversation touched tangentially on the subject of housing in the locality, Lingam became suddenly agitated. "People staying in the Taman Berjaya and even in Kampung Nehru tend to look down on the people in Kampung Keretapi. Although I stay in a *rumah batu* in Taman Berjaya, I don't want to get involved in these fights". The suggestion that residents of Kampung Keretapi are imputed to be of an "inferior" status because of the nature of the dwelling housing similarly resonated with a casual remark made by Subramaniam in another context. Here, Subramaniam cryptically observed that whilst the "Malays could live in any kind of house" the Indians and Chinese have, in comparison, more exacting requirements. Although his depiction of the geomantic ideals of the former was obviously inaccurate, I would argue, nevertheless, that his correlation was deliberately cast in order to invert the prevailing hegemony of the political landscape through the idiom of dwelling houses. Subramaniam's subtext was that living in structures which are in concord with the flow of spiritual forces imbues the resident with a superior moral status regardless of the signs of material affluence.

In his discussion of the Tamil house in South India, Daniel (1984:105ff) has suggested that the "figurative reality" of Tamil culture predisposes its speakers to construe houses and territory in person-centric terms. Like persons, houses are imbued with qualities and substances that require attention to their compatibility with and vulnerability to other houses.¹⁰ The notion that houses can stand for social groups and represent the surrounding world have been also highlighted in a recent collection on the house in Southeast Asia and Amazonia (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995). Like the human body, they are "basic cognitive models used to structure, think and experience the world" (Ibid.:3). Similarly, the idiom of the house in the context of a working class ethnic community emplaced within a locality that has seen radical demographic and aesthetic displacements over the past decade is a convenient homology for thinking about and marking social relationships. It does not so much explain as signify social and political hierarchies by conflating a whole plethora of intersecting relationships. For Indians, in particular, the

similarity between the *rumah panjang* and plantation "coolie" barrack is striking and suggests a poignant throwback to the "lowly" past, a past which most are keen to surmount.

At the same time, this imputed social status of Kampung Keretapi is actively contested by its local leaders. Once again, this is significantly prominent in the *thiruvila* and other publicly visible religious occasions. A well-known Tamil adage identifies the Hindu temple as the ideal focus of the well-being of any Hindu settlement. The pomp and elaborateness with which religious rituals and festivals are celebrated are thus not only actions deemed befitting for a deity but they also provide an index of the prosperity and cohesiveness of the worshipping community. An indication of the seriousness in which this visual contest was conducted came to my attention on the night of the chariot procession of the Gengai Amman celebrated about a month after Kampung Nehru's. The chariot was much bigger and higher, and had hundreds of tiny bulbs enveloping the niche in which the goddess would sit. A two-tonne generator towed by a small truck was rented for the occasion. The goddess herself was sumptuously decked with garlands of multicoloured flowers, a feat that required the expertise of a *pujari* from another *kovil*. Before the chariot was hauled out of the enclosed temple grounds for a tour of the settlement, two rows of young costumed girls performed an elaborate traditional stick dance to the accompaniment of lively sacred music broadcasted over loudspeakers. At the same time, a small team of teenage female and male helpers wearing identically coloured *saris* and *kurtas* with personalised name tags moved around enthusiastically directing human traffic and distributing boiled chickpeas and sweet cakes. Krishna had been watching from a short distance away in the night shadows when our paths unexpectedly crossed. He was visibly irate. As if to nullify the visual feast before us, he blurted out that the spacious temple site was originally reserved for the residents of Kampung Nehru but it was due to "the interference of politics into religion" that "the land was suddenly taken away from us". Should this trend continue, Krishna drew an ominous parallel with the ethnic conflicts in Sri Lanka and Bosnia.¹¹

Urban Hinduism and Hindu-Indian public culture

I wish to suggest that the varied attempts to accumulate and display cultural capital as highlighted in the previous section are not confined to the locality alone. In this section, I extend my discussion beyond the fieldwork site to further draw out the "public culture" of urban Hinduism. Rajoo (1993) has observed that urbanisation, modernisation

and the politics of the multi-ethnic context in Malaysia have led to various modifications. There is a reduction of Hindu domestic rites, the weakening of non-commensality between caste groupings, and changes in temple rituals. Moreover, he has identified an increasing trend towards "Agamic" or "Sanskritic" versions of Hinduism. More orthodox Hindu festivals (*Navarattiri*, *Shivarattiri* and so forth) previously observed by the middle and upper ranking castes are being celebrated by smaller temples, and there is a greater attention to the specifications of rituals as laid down in the *Agamas*. The notion of "Sanskritic Hinduism" is clearly indebted to Srinivas' pioneering study of the Coorgs in India (published in 1952). In his ethnographic example, Srinivas viewed Sanskritic Hinduism as theoretically opposed to village-based, local Hindu practices that do not draw from scriptural Sanskrit texts. "Sanskritization" is then commonly understood as a process by which the beliefs and practices of lower castes are made to converge toward those of higher castes as the former try to raise their status by emulating the latter. Whilst influencing subsequent studies, a number of criticisms have also been levelled against his division of Hinduism into two strata, the "Great Tradition" and the "Little Tradition". Fuller, for instance, has contended that Srinivas "made a stock anthropological error" by converting

an indigenous, ideological distinction into an analytical concept, and then applied it to the empirical evidence to try to divide what is actually united by common underlying themes and principles (Fuller 1992:27).

I would argue, however, despite the ideological baggage that "Sanskritization" may carry, it can be recycled as a shorthand concept that entails a process of making boundable groups by a convergence towards Sanskritic-type Hinduism. In the context of Malaysian public culture, temples, ritual practices and public festivities are not only arenas for communicating with divine agencies but also for reimagining social identities. This is discernible, for example, in the historical evolution of one of the oldest temples in the country. The Sri Maha Mariyamman Kovil Devasthanam is located in the oldest section of Kuala Lumpur city and was initially set up as a small shrine in 1873. Originally, it was largely patronised by the urban trading and artisan castes (particularly the Mukkulattor caste cluster) but this has since widened considerably. Today, the Devasthanam is portrayed as the most prestigious and influential *Agamic* temple in the country, and is consulted on ritual matters and other auspicious events in the Hindu calendar. It is also the obvious gravitational centre for aspiring Indian politicians and community leaders seeking religious sanction. Within this cultural logic, the President of the MIC is the undisputed official patron of the Devasthanam besides holding similar positions for a host of other Indian

organisations in the country. Other individuals and factions jockeying for lesser positions have occasionally given rise to internal strife which are sometimes made public via "flying letters", "whispering campaigns" and the vernacular newspapers.

Because of its traditionally preeminent position and status in the Malaysian Hindu landscape, there are undercurrents when relating with the Malaysian Hindu Sangam (MHS). The MHS was formed in 1965 by a group of Indian professionals, civil servants, teachers and businessmen. In comparison to numerous antecedent Hindu reform movements and Indian organisations which drew from a Dravidian ethos, the MHS is considered as "not anti-Brahminical and anti-Sanskritic in its outlook" (Lee and Rajoo 1987:405f). To rival the growing popularity and influence of the MHS, the Devasthanam set up an Association of Temples in the mid-1980s. Besides mediating the concerns of the Hindu community with the government and other religious bodies,¹² the MHS organises programmes aimed at promoting a wider awareness and use of Hindu scriptures, sacred songs and writings by saints.¹³

Most significantly, the Devasthanam coordinates the mammoth annual Thaipusam celebrations (associated with the Skanda-Murugan cult).¹⁴ An integral part of the celebrations entails an eight hour long chariot procession of Lord Subramaniam (another name of Murugan) from the Devasthanam to the Batu Caves shrine, with designated stops at various temples along the way. The "orgiastic" ritual practices of Thaipusam were originally a target of heavy criticism by leaders of the Tamil Reform Movement (TRA).¹⁵ They lobbied for Thaipusam to be banned but without widespread success. In the late 1940s, however, its leaders decided to abandon this strategy explaining that banning such festivities might have the unintended and undesirable effect of causing the disappearance of piety and religion amongst the "simpler folk".¹⁶ Since then, with each successive year the celebrations of Thaipusam in urban centres are reported as drawing progressively larger crowds of pilgrims, devotees and spectators. Many pilgrims not only travel from rural plantations and smaller towns within the state but also originate from other states. A much smaller group of foreign pilgrims that carry *kavadis* in Batu Caves are invariably highlighted in the vernacular newspapers lending further credence to the potency of the event. Additionally, Thaipusam is promoted by independent tour companies and the Tourism Board as a "colourful" spectacle and as another vivid illustration of the diversity of cultures in Malaysia. Consequently, bus loads of incongruent looking foreign tourists are becoming a regular feature of the Thaipusam landscape.

A preoccupation with planning, regulation and closer monitoring of activities around the Batu Caves temple grounds has also intensified with the progressive increase in crowds. Weeks before the event, the route and stops of the chariot procession, and special bus and train services are announced in the newspapers. At the temple grounds itself, stalls set up for business require official permits from the organisers. Outside the site, unlicensed mobile food vendors hoping to generate extra earnings are stalked by City Hall officials cruising around in a bright red lorry. Routinely, the organisers appeal to devotees and spectators alike (particularly Indian youths) to refrain from expressive actions that will turn the religious celebrations into a "carnival", a "comic spectacle" and a "mockery" of Hinduism. Stipulations on the permissible length of skewers and spears, on the type of music and musical instruments that can be used, bans on certain "exhibitionist" *kavadis* and so forth are disseminated and enforced.

Thaipusam is a highly visible and religiously charged event open to a heterogeneous audience, both to the gazes of Hindu "insiders" and non-Hindu "outsiders". It provides an arena for multiple meanings as well as varied agendas. Apart from the individual quest for "ritual self-creation" (Babb 1976, Clothey 1978), other studies have analysed the event in terms of a muted corporate expression of a nascent working-class consciousness amongst the Tamils (Collins 1991:309), and as an antithesis of Brahmanic Sanskritization (Lee 1989:335). As I have alluded to earlier, large scale ritual events like these are also strategic sites for reimagining a collective sense of a global Hindu-Indian identity in the face of a perceived cultural inundation by other religious and ethnic groups. This management of a public culture is engendered by the religious potency of the event and the sheer volume of Indians (Tamils and non-Tamils) present in these events. Significantly, key national political leaders also participate conspicuously in the temple rituals during these special moments whilst making laudatory statements of the unique cultural pluralism in the country, and of the need to keep intact the delicate balance between various ethnic and religious groups. Moderation in beliefs and practices are counselled. Much media attention is made of the MIC's appeals to the Federal government to designate Thaipusam as a nation-wide public holiday (in addition to Deepavali¹⁷). To date, the appeal has been annually made for the last 30 years but without success.¹⁸

Whilst these major religious festivities are organised by large established temples, for many small temples scattered throughout the urban landscape there are more pressing everyday concerns. What constitutes a proper Hindu temple¹⁹ has been rendered

particularly problematic in the light of the "Kerling Incident" of 1978 and recent urban planning priorities. Between 1978 and 1979, considerable media attention was focused on the trial of eight Indians accused of the killing of four Malay-Muslim youths in a clash that ensued when the youths appeared late at night to smash the Hindu deities in a community temple. A spate of similar desecration acts throughout parts of the country had been reported months earlier. Subsequently, the Deputy Prime Minister decried these actions as due to the "twisted interpretations of Islamic teachings for the benefit of several of their leaders".²⁰ Politicians and religious leaders pleaded for tolerance and mutual respect between Muslims and non-Muslims, and viewed these actions as jeopardising "national unity".

Like the ethnic riots of "May 13", the "Kerling Incident" has not diminished in the Hindu memoryscape, and is a convenient historical talking point about the ill consequences of religious zealotry and the sense of the embattledness of Hinduism in Malaysia.²¹ But there are also individualised attempts to mitigate these kinds of alarmist discourse. In my conversation with a Hindu Sangam representative, for instance, whilst it was conceded that the incident aroused considerable alarm at that time, nevertheless, as viewed through the lens of hindsight there was a positive effect; "temple desecration is now considered a serious criminal offence". Although there have been occasional reports of recent break-ins into temples, he believed that the culprits were drug addicts rather than religious fanatics more keen on getting into the donation boxes (*undial*) than making a theological point.

During the trial, police authorities also laboured to emphasise the sheer impossibility of guarding a multitude of temples dotted throughout the urban and rural landscapes. Many were built on "private" and "public" land without prior approval from the planning authorities. Subsequently, in the early 1980s the Hindu Sangam embarked on a census and registration exercise of all temples and shrines in the country. Key Indian politicians also periodically discouraged the "building of temples in every nook and corner of the country".²² Moreover, a piece of legislation by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government that gave statutory bodies powers to regulate the building of religious places of worship for non-Muslims was passed. It was argued that the demands of urban development projects required legal intervention against a seemingly random and haphazard mushrooming of shrines in the urban centres. Whilst recognising that the days of unrestricted temple building are effectively over, many Hindu leaders of more established temples have resorted to discarding non-Agamic practices and to consolidating

existing temples through refurbishments to prevent easy relocation.

Managing religiosity in the public sphere has thus become more marked, particularly in the urban centres. During the 1980s, researchers in the Prime Minister's Department embarked on an extensive study of religion in Malaysia alerted by the spawning of a number of non-mainstream type Islamic groups which were vocally critical of the government's professed Islamisation track record. The spectre of religiously-inspired confrontations and social unrest became the government's outstanding worry and the outcome of this research led to amendments to the Penal and Criminal Codes allowing religious dissent to be addressed (Ackerman and Lee 1990:58f).²³ Moreover, immigration policies with regard to the movement of foreign religious personnel - Muslim and non-Muslim - into the country were also modified to reflect this concern. A consequence has been that Hindu (as well as other non-Muslim religious) leaders frequently lament that these policies have progressively become more restrictive of South Asian nationals entering into the country. Because the pool of local Brahmin *kurrukkals*, temple musicians, and highly skilled temple sculptors is small, these individuals are still employed from India especially for fulfilling certain special ritual requirements. *Sannyasis* and *swamis* also visit regularly to serve the more literate Hindu public. Subsequently, one of the important mediating tasks of organisations like the MHS has been to regularly liaise with the Immigration Department and similar other statutory bodies in securing the necessary official permits for their entry.

Conclusion

Victor Turner's concept of liminality and *communitas* has indelibly left a mark on ritual and religious studies over the years. Basically, Turner (1969) argued that there is a dialectic between the mediacy of social structure (characterised as a "closed society" or "status system") and the immediacy of *communitas* (an "open society"). In the case of the latter, this modality of social relationships is typically, although not exclusively, engendered in religious rituals and festivities. Whilst social structure is organised in terms of caste, class, or rank hierarchies, and consequently marked by oppositions and conflicts, the "*communitas* emerges where social structure is not" (Ibid.). Moreover, Turner also observed that with the increasing social differentiation and specialisation of society and culture, there are tendencies to institutionalise the liminal "betwixt and between" state in the shape of new religious orders and movements.

When weighed against the ethnographic evidence of my fieldwork site, Turner's model offers certain persuasive possibilities. But like James Scott's formulation of the "hidden" and "public" transcripts (discussed in the Introduction chapter) it exaggerates the divide between two kinds of social relations, and belies the analytical logic of culturally specific kinds of epistemologies. However, this chapter has illustrated that the "religiosity" of social actors cannot be understood solely in terms of an impervious individualist quest for spiritual edification and benefits. The phenomenon is necessarily much more diffused, and entails an overlapping of localised knowledge and individual, social and political contexts. I have further suggested that religious imageries, language, and imagination are significant resources in negotiating with the socially mediated processes of Malaysian modernity. More to the point, in Kampung Nehru being a "Hindu" is as much informed by an awareness of being a culturally different albeit relatively disadvantaged ethnic group (Malaysian "Indians") in the national political ethnoscape as well as the more immediate experiences of the *kovil* being a site of local-level power struggles.

Given the historical particulars of Hinduism in Malaysia and the nature of routine interaction within the settlement as outlined in earlier chapters, religious festivals like the *thiruvila* engender various possible different layers of mythical and social spaces for organisers and participants alike. Whilst in the first instance, these ritual events invariably allow personal needs and anxieties to be addressed, the spatialised idioms and carnivalesque elements of this celebration are also particularly convenient for a number of other more corporate agendas. For instance, Anthony Cohen (1985) has argued that these kinds of symbolic activities are relatively fluid and expansive enough to allow participants to articulate a shared sense of belonging, of common identity, and of difference from non-participants. Moreover, the ambivalence of these activities does not easily allow others to subvert and attack the intentions of the participants. In Kampung Nehru, I suggested that the territoriality of Mariyamman provides her discerning devotees with an appropriate boundary-expressing activity where the *kampung*'s spatial and symbolic boundaries have been incrementally undermined and blurred by the influx of Malay-Muslim residents over the years. There is a palpable sense of ethnic and cultural inundation and fragmentation. With its present "community" life far from convivial, the *thiruvila* also provides important occasions to reconstitute "community" through an inscription of locality. Against the perceived cultural and spatial hegemony of Malay-Muslims, a semblance of power, authority and ownership over the locality is staked and paraded, and the *kampung* residents momentarily revel in their mobility. With respect to other Indian residents living in the

envied "modern housing" (*rumah batu*) or the maligned *rumah panjang* in the neighbouring *kampung*, the festival, moreover, allows devotees to make thinly veiled public statements about the continued efficacy of Mariyamman and the conviviality of Kampung Nehru as a whole despite its troubled past and fragmented present. In short, the *thiruvila* allows for a publicly ritualised distancing from non-participants as well as an accentuation of symbolic boundaries, involving both externalised opposition and internalised levelling.

The chariot procession itself within the immediate locality fulfils the ritual function of "filling out" mundane spaces through the idiom of mythical meanings. By doing so, it transforms these spaces into a habitable place, and the local landscape is rendered religiously recognisable to its devotees (cf. de Certeau 1984). The affective bond between people and place, and between individuals is once again symbolically reconstituted. In comparison to the massive chariot procession of Lord Murugan during Thaipusam which has a wider spectrum of agendas, the local chariot procession meets parochial needs and has more manageable organisational parameters. Whilst there may be a difference of scale between these practices, the experiences of social actors are, nevertheless, informed by the linkages and self-representations that interpenetrate them.

Simultaneously, there is an ambience of local rivalry and competition mediated through the notion of territorial "village goddesses". The indeterminacy, multivocality, and carnivalesque elements of these public ritual events are particularly conducive for contending agents desiring to imbue them with less specifically religious concerns. In the ethnographic example of Kampung Nehru and the locality, I have illustrated how new and more elaborate ritual practices were selectively conscripted to "elevate" and publicise the material status and moral standing of the residents. Additionally, non-religious markers could be deployed for the same purpose. For instance, I made reference to temple leaders in the nearby *kovil* of Kampung Keretapi incorporating "modern" public relations and marketing strategies in their *thiruvila* (and other celebrations) so as to reflect a veneer of professionalism. By comparison, Kampung Nehru which has a less cohesive *kampung* spirit and smaller *kovil* membership, the inclusion of Sanskrit religious events into its temple calendar suggest equivalent purposes. Thus, whilst the inaugural celebration of an expensive and highly elaborate divine marriage ceremony was expressly initiated to foster closer relations between Hindus residents in the locality, it would not be, nevertheless, too far-fetched to read into it a sense of veiled rivalry as well. The all-night *homa* ceremony in Kampung Nehru initiated by Krishna, in a similar vein, was not only to improve the

improve the participant's *karmic* position and build up a *kampung* spirit, but also to underscore the universality and appropriateness of a Sanskritic-type Hinduism for modern urban living.

The act of ritualisation thus inhere both strategic and tactical possibilities, serving to accumulate, display and buttress vested interests. It illustrates once again that human beings do not only live in existing relationships but that they also produce new kinds of relationships in order to live. By asserting a cultural and religious autonomy, it could be argued that many Hindus in the *kampung* are, without much prompting, responding to perceived growing dispersions, intrusions and intolerance to their faith. For local leaders, however, these isolated and individualised incidents of solidarity are not recurrent nor extensive enough to build up durable safeguards. They characteristically lament the present state as marked by an absence of a cohesive ethnic identity and solidarity, requiring in turn the antidote of a rejuvenated Hindu community.

In this chapter, I have argued that a broader understanding of the ethnicised religious and political landscapes in Malaysia helps to appreciate how residents are constituted in the immediate locality of Kampung Nehru. Conversely, I have looked to everyday practices as prisms revealing the linkages between different sites that contribute towards a "public culture" of Hinduism. There is a keen, if sometimes tentatively articulated, recognition and awareness that Hindu devotees are living in difficult and rapidly changing times. On the one hand, secularist modernisation and aggressive proselytisation by other religious groups collude to render Hindu beliefs and practices seemingly archaic and irrelevant to the young. In everyday life and experiences, ordinary Hindu devotees and leaders encounter a range of indicators that portray their faith as irrational, and as a religious system that is incommensurate with the truth claims of monotheistic and modernising Christian and Islamic groups. On the other, there is an unease that as a politically demarcated group, ethnic "Indians" are being left behind in the country's current phase of rapid "development" and economic buoyancy. The high incidence of crime and drug abuse by an underclass of Indian youths epitomise eloquently for them this double bind. These tensions are particularly acutely felt in a squatter settlement like Kampung Nehru, situated on the margins of both trends. Informed by these contending forces, leaders and devotees alike endeavour to make for a meaningful and recognisable locality by re-creating Hinduism within the spaces where they live, work and play.

NOTES

1. Rajoo's research (1985a) revealed that a small thatched shrine for Muniswaran (or Muniandi) had existed in the earliest years of the settlement. As a meat-eater and alcohol-drinker, he is outside the orthodox divine pantheon. Although Muniswaran is considered to be the most ubiquitous male deity throughout Malaysia, his lowly non-Agamic status in recent years is gradually being transformed either by amalgamation with another Agamic deity (e.g., Ganesha) or by upgrading priests, rituals and temple architecture (Aveling 1978:181).

In Kampung Nehru, the *talaivar* had wanted to replace Muniswaran with another popular deity, Murugan. However, the settlers objected and requested for Mariyamman instead as there was already a Murugan temple nearby. Over the years, Murugan and Ganesha were added to the *kovil* and they are seated in separate berths to the left and right of Mariyamman respectively (see Figure 1). Both are brothers, being the male offsprings of Siva and Parvati. Ganesha, the elder son, is often viewed as a playful, jovial and accessible deity in charge of demons and malevolent spirits, and a *puja* is conducted for him before the starting of any ritual, business enterprise and marriage restrictions (Courtright 1985). Murugan, in comparison, is an evocative warrior deity with mythologies that extol his youthfulness, attractiveness, and eternality. In recent decades, Murugan has become an iconic vehicle to express the ascendant mood of Tamil self-respect and self-consciousness (Clothey 1978).

2. For special *pujas*, devotees buy coupons for *archanai* (prayer items consisting of half a coconut, camphor cubes, bananas and incense sticks) costing 1.50 *ringgit*. The *pujari* receives a fixed allowance of 200 *ringgit* per month excluding commissions from *archanai* and *upayam*.

3. Unlike other religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the ebb and flow of religiosity amongst Hindus cannot be mapped by a simplistic transfer of measuring methods (e.g., church attendances). Similar to Chinese popular religions, the Hindu festival cycle coordinates a number of ritual events in time and space - "tempocosms" - rather than by doctrinal unity or congregational commitment (Beck 1976, cf. DeBenardi 1992).

4. All footwear was removed before devotees entered the *kovil*. Moreover, devotees should have bathed and put on clean clothes as well. The "cleanliness" of the *kovil* is to keep away "impure" spirits (*pey*) as well as maintain it in a state inhabitable for the residing deities.

5. This "matter-of-fact" view of spirit possession also occurred in the *thiruvila* of Kampung Keretapi. A young woman *kavadi* who danced vigorously with intermittent bursts of screams prompted another devotee to comment to me later that "even in normal life she prays a lot anyway".

6. Problems like these are amplified in large scale events like Thaipusam (commemorating Murugan) where hundreds of youth gangs congregate, and riot police in full gear have become a permanent feature.

7. Normally, such processions would involve an circumambulation of the *kovil* but given the spatial limitations, this was not possible in this instance.

8. For instance, I chanced across old newspaper accounts reporting allegations that the "chariot" route for Thaipusam was avoiding "low-caste" residences in the Indian-dominated

section of Georgetown, Penang.

9. The day before, I was told that this would be an "enjoyable" part of the festivities and cryptically advised to wear "old" clothes.

10. More specifically,

the person-house relationship is as a union of a 'deindividuated' metonym and a 'desymbolized' synecdoche, wherein some significant quality of the one inheres in the totality of the other, a quality that suffuses and constitutes the essential nature of both relata. Houses may not be persons in very detail, but they come so close to being persons that the likeness cannot be missed (Daniel 1984:161f).

11. However, it would be misleading to suggest that there were no attempts at rapprochement. This was explicitly the case in the inaugural celebration of an elaborate and expensive divine wedding ceremony (associated with established Agamic temples) in the Mariyamman *kovil*. Devotees from various *kovil* in the locality were invited to participate by bringing wedding gifts.

12. According to a survey conducted by the MHS some years ago, there are 17,000 temples and shrines found throughout the country, many of which are not registered. Recent MHS initiatives encourage larger and more established temples to move beyond celebrating religious festivals and to attend to the social needs of poorer Hindus through the setting up of education, and welfare and social committees. By addressing these concerns, the MHS believe that the phenomenon of "unethical" conversions to Islam and Christianity in Malaysia could be stemmed. For example, it was reported that over a 25-year period (1965-90), about 130,000 Hindus had converted to Christianity and another 30,000 to Islam. The bulk of converts to Christianity are to the Protestant churches, particularly the Tamil Methodist Church (97,000). The article went on to elaborate that:-

Christian propagation methods and its effects are well known to most Hindus: free Sunday classes for children, house to house visitations, healing sessions by visiting preachers, social service in neglected areas like the squatter and slum areas, exploitation of the emotional and gullible Hindus during their weak moments and partly the social acceptability of becoming a Christian. The rural Hindus find this appealing as they are unable to socialise with their urban, educated and caste-conscious Hindu brethren (*Hinduism Today*, February 1992).

On further investigation, however, the number of conversions along the lines suggested appear to be exaggerated. For instance, the official membership figures of the Tamil Methodist Church over the same period fluctuated only between 2,745 to 6,131.

13. For instance, a Hinduism correspondence course modelled on the Seventh-Day Adventist's "Voice of Prophecy" was started but without much success. The MHS is best known for the *Tirumurai* Festival where selected hymns inspired by the *Nayanmars* (Saivite saints) are recited with prizes and certificates awarded for finalists.

14. Newspaper accounts of Thaipusam in Kuala Lumpur over a 20-year period (1974-94) indicate that crowd numbers had risen from about 300,000 to in excess of 700,000. Correspondingly, the number of persons performing *kavadi* has grown from about 1,000 to 3,000.

15. Attempts at reforming certain ceremonial practices seen as buttressing the negative

images of Hinduism with respect to animal blood sacrifices, *kavadi* and fire-walkers goes back as far as the 1930s with the formation of the Tamil Reform Association (TRA). The TRA was inspired by the Dravidian movement in Madras and was initially concerned with a wide range of concerns like education, health, caste prejudice and Brahmin dominance. Ramaswamy Naicker, a prominent leader, made a visit to Malaya in 1929. For details on the TRA in Malaysia, see Arasaratnam 1970:128ff.

Interestingly, in the early 1980s, a ban on musical instruments by the Singapore government led to devotees resorting to carrying portable cassette players with taped devotional music. For relevant accounts of Thaipusam in Malaysia, see Lee 1989 and Collins 1991.

16. The tension between "traditional" and "modernist" religiosities continues to be prominent as evident in the following comments made by a prominent Malaysian Hindu leader:

A disturbing trend among our 'modernists' and the 'English educated' is their movement away from temples and temple-worship, towards new Hindu-based *sangams* and *sabahs*, *mandrams* and missions, where they gather on weekends to sing *bhajans*, to pray, to listen to learned discourses on Hindu religion and philosophy [and] in the process distancing from traditional temple worship which is both a magic and a mystery!...They would rather devote their time to social and cultural activities than 'join the crowds' in temples! (see 'Role and responsibilities of Hindu temples in Malaysia', *Hinduism Today*, June 1994).

17. Deepavali was probably chosen as a national holiday as the MIC was initially led by North Indians. From the mid-1950s, the MIC leadership has seen an increasing "Tamilisation" (Arasaratnam 1970: 129ff).

A notable feature of the celebration of major religious festivals in Malaysia includes the notion of an "open house". Homes are "open" on specified days for visits by relatives, friends and well-wishers. Newspapers routinely report the details (with accompanying photographs) of the large crowds of "ordinary Malaysians" to the homes of important national political leaders as reflecting the "true Malaysian spirit".

In Kampung Nehru, very few households celebrated Deepavali. Two main reasons were offered: celebrating Deepavali is an expensive affair and would not be a burden for the rich and those who can afford it; Deepavali is mainly celebrated by Hindu-Indians tracing their ancestry to North India. In the households that I visited during this occasion, I was told with some embarrassment that unlike what is normally depicted in the newspapers, their Malay-Muslim and Indian-Christian neighbours had never once visited their homes, nor had they in turn participated in their neighbours' respective religious festivities.

18. Thaipusam is legislated as a regional holiday in states where there is a significant Indian population - Johor, Negri Sembilan, Perak, Penang, and Selangor.

Recently, certain politicians have appropriated publicity techniques prevalent in Tamil Nadu in cultivating the aura of movie-stars. For instance, in the 1994 Thaipusam celebrations a giant "cutout" of the current MIC president made its inaugural appearance at the Batu Caves temple ground drawing a mixture of unbridled admiration, grudging respect, and thinly veiled mockery from some of the devotees and spectators that I spoke to.

19. The MHS categorises temple structures into three main types: permanent structures with sound financial sources; semi-permanent structures supported with voluntary help of a community but not well-maintained; and temporary structures that are entirely dependent on voluntary help.

20. 'Dr M[ahathir] hits at the desecrators', *New Straits Times*, 24 May, 1979. Dr Mahathir is the current Prime Minister of Malaysia.

21. This sense is given further weight by localised stories of discrimination. For instance, I was told that a *pujari* in another settlement was threatened by neighbouring Muslim youths not to sound the temple bell early in the morning for *puja* as it ostensibly interfered with their sleep. In another case, a small piece of land earlier earmarked for a Hindu temple site had been given away for a *surau* instead.

Amongst Christian circles, there were also similar stories of discrimination. The most recent and widely disseminated involved the stopping of the construction of a large church building in Shah Alam in mid-1993 as a result of pressure from Islamic organisations in the locality (see 'State stops church construction work', *Aliran Monthly* 1994:14).

22. See *Minutes of Malaysian Hindu Sangam AGM 1977 & 1978* held on 24 June, 1979.

23. Keeping "religious extremists" away from the mainstream body of believers dates back to the colonial period because of the long-standing association between popular religious practices and Chinese secret-society criminal activities.

Chapter Six

BEING A CHURCH IN A SQUATTER KAMPUNG:

Embodying Adventism on the Margins

The reasons and circumstances for the choice of the Seventh-Day Adventist (SDA) church as a comparative focus of study has been explained earlier (see Introduction).¹ In terms of both its history and religious beliefs and practices, there are striking contrasts to Hindu devotees in the Mariyamman *kovil* in the social use of space and in the context of a squatter *kampung*. In this chapter, I look at the domain of the SDA church in Kampung Nehru posing to it a similar cluster of questions that were raised for the *kovil*; how is religious life constituted? What kind of social maps of meaning are being offered? How are they, in turn, received and modified?

Once again, it is pertinent to remember that my status as a conspicuous "outsider" and "stranger" to the *kampung* engendered certain fieldwork difficulties which constrained me from obtaining full answers to these questions. This was accentuated by my physical appearance and demeanour which, in contrast to a congregation of largely working class Telegu Indians, stood out. Despite my introductory letters and reassurances to the church elders and regular appearances at the SDA church for "Sabbath worship" over the ensuing months I was generally regarded with a sense of guardedness and puzzlement by the adult members. In comparison to the Hindu residents, however, this social distancing seemed more palpable. As will be made clear, this can be attributed to the sectarian legacy and beliefs of the SDA denomination as a whole as well as the specific historical circumstances of the church in the locality.

To anticipate my argument, this chapter will show that in comparison to the prominence of the SDA Church in numerous other countries, being a "squatter church" as well as being identified with a minority ethnic group in Malaysia engenders certain constraints and possibilities. A different repertoire of coping with its marginality and of sustaining its vitality is imagined and put into practice. This, in turn, mitigates a sense of conviviality and solidarity with other residents in the *kampung*, particularly in the context of imminent eviction.

Staking a place in Kampung Nehru

Mainstream churches have historically adopted an ambivalent attitude towards the SDA², and aspersions on the legitimacy of its Christian-ness were commonplace. The church traces its roots to the Millerite movement in the middle of the nineteenth century in North America which predicted a literal and bodily return of Jesus Christ based on certain key biblical passages. Infused with millenarian³ fervour, its followers were derided as disruptive, biblicist and fanatical. When the appointed hour did not materialise ("The Great Disappointment"), some of its subsequent leaders appropriated certain key ideas whilst erecting new identity markers particularly in the area of health and diet. As the movement slowly gained respectability with a significant proportion of its North American membership coming from the higher social classes, the SDA leadership has exhibited a keenness to redress its past sectarian images. Consequently, coupled with publicising its extensive global network of educational, health and medical institutions⁴ (see Appendix 5), a considerable corpus of easy-to-read literature and public relations exercises have been generated for non-Adventist readership particularly since the 1950s.⁵

In other parts of Southeast Asia, the SDA has a well-publicised network of schools, colleges, sanatoriums, hospitals, food companies and publishing houses. In peninsular Malaysia, by comparison, the only SDA institution is a well-patronised hospital set up many decades ago as part of their social outreach work. Besides its frequent anti-smoking and other health campaigns, the SDA also maintains its traditional emphasis on evangelism through various programmes and avenues. For non-SDA Christian "outsiders", the distinctive beliefs of the SDA Church are often viewed with some disquiet. In my conversations with a number of non-SDA pastors and laypersons, the words "cult" or "sect" - terms of doctrinal deviancy in Christian discourse - were sometimes used to characterise the SDA. Whilst its core of beliefs and practices overlap substantially with the stock of mainstream Christian doctrines and theological systems there are, nonetheless, certain striking departures. The three that are frequently cited in religious encyclopaedias are its emphasis on the Second Advent (from the Latin, *adventus* meaning "the coming") of Christ; observance of the Sabbath from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday with corporate worship and bible studies held during this period (instead of Sunday which is considered in the Roman Gregorian calendar to be the first day of the week), and an obligatory stance on the dietary and health aspects of the believer. Besides advocating an abstinence from alcohol and tobacco, the prohibitions as prescribed in the books of Leviticus 11 and

Deuteronomy 14:3-20 where the flesh of certain "unclean" animals regarded as taboo are still held as efficacious and practised.

In the denominational newsletter, *The Messenger*, the first reference to an organised group of SDAs that later was to be the antecedent of the Indian church in Kampung Nehru dates back to the early 1930s.⁶ The original members were Telegus brought over from India to work in a plantation situated not too far from its present site. Reports submitted intermittently charting the evolution of this church convey a sense of self-reliance necessitated by limited financial resources. When church buildings were renovated or newly constructed, for instance, it was highlighted (with accompanying photographs) that they were completed over an extended period without the intervention of expensive contractors and as a collective church effort with materials purchased through donations given by individuals or other SDA congregations.

As recounted by the Pastor Isaiah, the present pastor, the SDA church in Kampung Nehru has a long history of constant resettlement. In the thirty years that he has been acquainted with it, the church had to move three times, and with the present proposed redevelopment it will be re-sited once again. The first church premises were built on a piece of land provided by an European estate manager. Initially, the SDA work prospered and at its height the pastor remembers a fairly large sanctuary structure with additional buildings for a kindergarten and a training centre for lay workers. However, by the time he started pastoral work in the mid-1960s, the church premises had been demolished because the plantation was sold off and redeveloped. A building was rented on the southern fringe of PJ in a landscape that was then dominated by mining activities, plantations and primary jungle. Meanwhile, an official application was made to the state authorities for a suitable titled piece of land on which to set down permanent roots. In 1969, it was decided that a new building should be built after a period of "fasting and praying". Pastor Isaiah felt that the absence of a meeting place of their own demoralised many members and attendance at Sabbath services dropped drastically. Together with youths, he selected a piece of "jungle beside Old Klang Road" to build a "lamb shelter". The building was originally constructed on low stilts, and was sited on the fringes of Kampung Nehru.

At around this time, the genesis of Kampung Nehru was already well under way, and the presence of a new religious grouping in their midst were not well received by some of the local Indian youths. Pastor Isaiah remembers vividly the many occasions when some

of these boisterous youths would hurl stones onto the chapel roof (made of corrugated zinc) and others crawling beneath the building to knock on the floorboards to disrupt Sabbath services with the hope of instilling fear and coercing them into moving away from the settlement. However, they remained firm and eventually these disturbances subsided as their novelty wore off. Around 1980, the church building had to be demolished and resited to its present location in Kampung Nehru when the authorities compulsorily acquired this stretch of land along Jalan Klang Lama for the construction of a highway flyover. With the proposed redevelopment of the locality, the church is required to shift yet again. Ironically, an irregular-shaped parcel of titled land situated just across Sungei Penchala has been offered as compensation by the present developers of the housing scheme, nearly thirty years after an application for land was first submitted to the state authorities.⁷

Embodying Sabbath worship

In this section, I describe in detail the domain in which members congregate weekly to embody and manifest their adherence to the SDA Church. I describe not only the routines of the ritual proper but to the specific ways in which these spaces are used. Additionally, I give attention to how various members reflect on social relations and contextualise some of the tenets of the SDA. In comparison to the Hindu devotees and worship practices at the Mariyamman *kovil*, two preliminary points should be noted at the outset. Firstly, only a handful of families that worship at the SDA church in Kampung Nehru actually reside within the settlement. Most of them live elsewhere or have moved out to other settlements. Secondly, and perhaps paradoxically, as the SDA church as a whole exhibits a more explicitly articulated and synchronised worship form, its presence in the settlement only becomes particularly apparent on Saturdays.

The SDA church building is a yellow and blue rectangular wooden and brick structure situated along Jalan Besar, a stone's throw from Jalan Kelang Lama (see Map 1). A faded-looking signboard and a cross mounted on the rooftop are the only prominent indicators distinguishing it from neighbouring buildings as a Christian place of worship (see Plate 6). As in the *kovil*, whatever available space is well utilised in the context of scarce land. Narrow strips of land enveloping three sides of the building are fully cemented over to act as an external extension of the inside when the need arises (see Figure 2). With clearly demarcated fencing - a mix of salvaged wooden boards and rusty iron grills - the church

has the appearance of a sheltered and protected piece of private property. Partly, this is motivated by the infrequent use of the premises and also, as related by the pastor, by acts of vandalism in the past ("to prevent the church from being dirtied"). Except for Saturday mornings (for Sabbath worship), Wednesdays evenings (for prayer meetings), and for the occasional specially organised talks, the building is locked up and left to the responsibility of a resident Hindu-Indian caretaker living in a small shack to the rear.

Inside, the floor space of the sanctuary is dominated by six rows of heavy wooden pews facing an elevated stage. As these pews were insufficient to seat the entire congregation during Sabbath worship, additional folding metal chairs and wooden benches are lined along the sides and rear portions of the room. To the front, the platform is bare except for a curtain backdrop hung against the wall, a preaching pulpit (positioned in the middle to emphasise the centrality of preaching), and slightly behind it, three chairs equidistant to one another. Directly in front of the preaching pulpit at ground level is another wooden pulpit (for announcements), and alongside it an elongated table for a transparent plastic box used for monetary offerings and tithes.

When I first encountered the SDA premises after about 4 months of fieldwork, what immediately struck me was the interior decor. In comparison to the Mariyamman *kovil* and other church sanctuaries familiar to me, it seemed spartan with minimal fixtures and religious iconography. For instance, Christian calligraphy and scrolls, candles, an opened bible or even a cross - paraphernalia which are commonplace in Protestant denominations - are conspicuously absent, and the only ornaments are a pair of vases of fresh flowers placed in front of a pulpit.⁸ Louvered glass windows were constructed on three sides of the building for ventilation. Near to the doorway, a notice board containing a flower rota and a chart monitoring donations for a building fund project (in view of the impending eviction) are posted. It was only during the Christmas weekend that the interior of the church became festooned with decorations and ablaze with colour. The interior walls were given a fresh coat of paint. Balloons, glittery streamers and bell-shaped styrofoams were strung across the ceilings. New curtains adorned the windows. A plastic Christmas tree layered with cotton to simulate snow stood next to the pulpit, and a banner with the words, "Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year" hung prominently over the pulpit.

The weekly Sabbath worship attracted a regular attendance of around 80 people of whom about a third would be men and boys. On special occasions, like Christmas, Easter,

Communion and various days commemorating the SDA pioneers the numbers increased significantly and the cemented spaces outside the building overflowed with people. Although the church rolls reported a membership of 180 baptised individuals, the pastor explained that only about 130 could be considered as "serious in Sabbath worship". He attributed the low attendance of men to "work-related problems" - more than two-thirds of its membership were factory workers.⁹ But Pastor Isaiah was hopeful of improvements as about two-thirds of the present congregation was "young" (below 30 years of age) and better educated. Moreover, as a high ratio was "won" over from other Christian denominations they would be more teachable and firm in their convictions.

Through habit, there is an understanding that pews and the front portion of the church are reserved for women and children. If they became fully occupied, latecomers resorted to the side chairs nearer to the pulpits. Men and male teenagers, by contrast, gravitated to the rear of the church, around the doorway. This gender-differentiated seating arrangement extended to the youth choir of about 10 individuals where female teenagers are separated by a narrow but perceptible gap from their other three male colleagues. For young children, however, differentiation by space is strikingly absent. Whereas adult men and women are confined to their seats for the duration of the worship service, children wandered at will around the sanctuary area and beyond to the porch outside.

On Saturdays, signs of activity usually commenced by 8.30am. The church building is unlocked by the caretaker for two female teenagers assigned for the day to sweep the floors clean. Like in the Mariyamman *kovil*, footwear was not worn in the sanctuary area but because of the daily traffic of vehicles along Jalan Besar the floors become readily dusty. Frequently, even before the task is fully completed, a growing stream of SDA members would have appeared. Over the years, most SDA households that originally resided in Kampung Nehru had moved out to other settlements and modern residential estates leaving only six families within the vicinity itself at the time of fieldwork. Making their way by foot, bicycles or public transport, the early arrivals are predominantly women and girls. As they enter the church building, elderly women would pull a shawl over their heads. The majority of women and girls, however, do not observe this custom. An ambience of quietness pervades as conversations and movements are brief, restrained, and conducted in hushed tones. Most are engrossed in softly muttered prayers.

But the mood quickly changes with the arrival of Margaret, the leader for this part

of the Sabbath worship. A few devotional hymns are sung from memory and unaccompanied by any musical instruments. This is interspersed with readings of short passages from scriptures. The bulk of the time is used for "testimonies" by individuals assigned for the week. Generally, the genre of the testimonies is woven around insights gained through the daily experiences of doubts, struggles and triumphs in the light of scriptural texts that underlined inner peace, the faithful love of God, and divine providence in daily matters. This discourse is not one-sided, however, as comments and affirmations often arose spontaneously from the congregation. Even though it was explained to me that there are no gender restrictions to the meetings, this session is peopled overwhelmingly by women. By default, this time was appropriated by women in addition to the regular women's meetings conducted after church services.

In both set of activities, Margaret plays a prominent role. In her mid-30s, single, and comparatively well educated, she seemed the obvious choice. One morning, she explained, however, that she had not always been so active in church affairs. Although her SDA lineage could be traced back on her mother's side to the state of Andhra Pradesh in India, it was only when she was 20 years of age that she had a transforming vision of the "truthfulness" of the SDA's teachings and her relative laxity in adhering to the Sabbath. Her greater involvement in church life increasingly led to her being entrusted with more responsibilities, and her current position as the coordinator of both the Sabbath School and children's programmes placed her as a role model for aspiring younger women. Margaret described herself as having a "half-modern" attitude towards feminism and the women's movement. When I asked her about her opinion of the proscribed roles for women in the Bible, her response revealed a similar betwixt and between position - "it may be true that the Bible talks about men leading women but there should still be greater equality between women and men". Achieving "greater equality" does not, however, necessarily translate into taking up leadership positions in church committees. Although it is evident that "women formed the backbone of the church in faithfully giving tithes, donating flowers, and cleaning the church" she explained that the disproportionate representation of women teachers in the church is due to low literacy ("women here are not very educated") rather than to the dominant disposition of the SDA with regard to the role of women in the church. Lacking the resources and confidence to scrutinise scriptures and other religious literature for themselves, they are placed at the moment in a dependent position on men pastors and teachers.

Nonetheless, Margaret expressed hopes that this lopsidedness would decline gradually over time as increasingly more girls in the church have access to secondary school education. To support her argument, she made reference to the prevalence of women in educational ministries in the SDA churches of Western Europe and the USA.¹⁰ In the absence of an overt cry for an "equalisation" of power in the formalised authority structure, it is tempting to read their piety as passive complicity. Traditional Indian notions of womanhood and domesticity circumscribe and complicate their choices even though many might have access to modern education and waged occupation. Faced with such difficulties, studies in other contexts suggest that women sometimes tactically create a separate sphere of autonomy to mitigate their total incorporation into the prevailing practices (e.g., Abu-Lughod 1986). Opportunities to congregate regularly as a group, to articulate their individual problems and daily triumphs through the idiom of prayers and religious language provide a space to refocus, and infuse a sense of dignity to their respective life situations.

The next part of "Sabbath worship" involves the congregation being segregated along gender and age lines for their respective "Sabbath classes". Normally lasting an hour, these classes have been placed here for convenience as in other local contexts, they could be held separately on Fridays. Women remain seated on the pews whilst men gather into a semi-circle near the doorway. Only youths and children are not segregated by gender although in the case of the former this is still manifested in terms of seating arrangements. Guided by chaperones, the youths congregate at the side veranda whilst the front porch is allocated for children (see Figure 2).

For months, I alternated my attendance between the men's and youth's Sabbath classes. In the men's group, the studies were frequently dominated by a core of three individuals despite the many repeated interventions of the convenor to spread the flow of the discussions more evenly. The remaining group members were relegated to the role of "silent" spectators. Whilst there were no obvious indications that this was a point of contention, I became less sure of this nearing to the end of fieldwork when it was casually pointed out to me by one of these "silent" individuals that the main protagonist of these discussions ("the best dressed person with a beeper") is a business executive and a prominent church leader. Said cryptically with a wry smile, the covert message of this disclosure, it seemed to me, was to signal discreetly to the "stranger" the power relations within the church and to register his silent protest.

"Sabbath classes" for this group followed closely a curriculum which focused on different themes over a period of time. A slim study book entitled, "Last call for Heaven" was used. This particular study book elaborated on the trademark Adventist theme of the imminent return of Jesus Christ, and the ethical and evangelistic implications for everyday living. A typical weekly entry contained selected biblical passages to be memorised, a brief exposition, and a series of questions directed at underlining the central lessons of the texts. Almost everybody in this group had made photocopies of the study booklet that had English, Malay and Tamil translations. Discussions, nonetheless, were conducted in Tamil with liberal interjections of English phrases. The convenor himself possessed a teacher's manual which provided suggestions and additional notes on the desired conclusion for each discussion.

The youth group, in comparison, has a more flexible and text-less curriculum. Bible quizzes and topical discussions were frequent and popular. Generally, the inputs from these individuals were more evenly distributed although male teenagers tended to speak more frequently. Discussions could be just as engaged, but they were less strained. Whilst seating arrangements were gender differentiated, bodily postures were noticeably less cultivated. Many tended to slouch for instance, a feature that is comparatively absent in the men's group. The youths were chaperoned by a male adult "advisor". Occasionally, he had to be away on preaching engagements in other churches and during these times the surrogate teaching role fell to his younger sister, the oldest person in this group of school-going youths aged between 13 to 18 years. Despite her attempts at policing, the ambience remained relaxed, and conversations were spirited and free flowing. Their mirth invariably could be heard in other parts of the church. Regularly, the pastor would come over to reprimand them. In one of these interventions, a female teenager turned to me and whispered, "the old people in the church are always trying to control us". Although she did not specifically name the individual, she said she "loathed" (*benci*) one of the church leaders whom she described as proud and arrogant (*sombong*). This unsolicited remark freely uttered also hid from me at the same time the nebulous contexts in which it was embedded. Indeed, it aptly illustrated my aura as a "stranger" of a different ethnic ancestry unshackled by the constraint of custom and habit. Many of the youths were not reluctant to explore the unpatrolled space that this in turn created for them. For instance, whilst my presence would be ignored in the men's group, amongst the youths I was frequently quizzed about my opinions on the topics at hand or invited to utter prayers at the beginning or end of each class.

Not unexpectedly, a few church leaders tended to view these youths as lacking in motivation and spiritual discipline. The low and irregular attendances in the "Pathfinder Club" youth meetings (held on Sundays) was cited as an obvious example justifying the arguments for more intervention and censure. In comparison, my conversations with youths suggested that the reasons for their apparent lack of interest were mixed and complicated by individual circumstances. Whilst some felt that the programmes dealt with irrelevant topics, there were a number who explained the practical problems that they have to face in having to return to the settlement for another regular event. Some did not look forward to travelling the long distances and incurring extra expenditure. A few had part-time jobs at weekends whilst others helped out with their parents' business or provided tuition (at a fee) to primary school children in their neighbourhood to help ease their parents' financial burdens.

Once the Sabbath class is concluded and the segregated groups reconvened within the interior of the church, there is a series of uninterrupted ritual actions periodically punctuated by prayers and hymns. Weekly, these structured actions were repeated with minimal variation except for special occasions (see below). A small stock of hymns was always sung from memory. No printed liturgical texts or song sheets were used which contrasted with the dominant practice of large urban churches. In recent years, printed texts have been additionally supplemented with the use of overhead projectors for song lyrics and confessional prayers. Drum sets, electric guitars and casiotone keyboards are also part of the ensemble of modern technology keenly appropriated. Particularly prevalent in pentecostal and charismatic congregations (but also increasingly filtering into mainstream churches), these new practices are deliberately to allow hands to be freed for stylised movements at particular moments of worship. In comparison, SDA members in Kampung Nehru familiarised themselves with a set of ritual movements and utterances (songs, prayers and bodily postures) relatively free from these innovations.

After a brief announcement, congregants are invited to come forward and deposit their tithes enclosed in white envelopes into the transparent box. As elaborated later, tithing has both important symbolic and pragmatic significance, and this portion of the worship is performed with deliberate care. Weekly, there is a small but constant stream of tithes and donations deposited. On special occasions, the volume of this stream increases. Next, intercessory prayers are said by the pastor and those who have special needs are requested to stand up from where they are sitting.

Another transition occurs at this point as an opening hymn is sung. From now on, all singing is musically accompanied by the syncopated beatings of a solitary drum. Nearing the end of the hymn, three men (of whom one would always be the pastor or preacher for the week) would stride uniformly up to the raised platform through a side entrance. As the last stanza trails off, everybody immediately kneels down to the floor for a short signature hymn followed by another (the doxology) sung standing up. More prayers and hymns (one of which is presented by the youth choir) follow in rapid succession before cloth pouches are brought around the congregation by two men for anonymous monetary offerings.

The pinnacle of Sabbath worship is the sermon. Prefaced by portions of scripture read according to a lectionary, these didactic monologues normally lasted between 30-40 minutes and are always delivered by the pastor or visiting preacher. Unlike many mainstream churches, sermons in this context are not read from a prepared script but have the verisimilitude of an inspired utterance. The cultivated legacy of Ellen White's prophetic teachings and ecstatic visions places a premium on this mode of knowledge and speaking. At the same time, there is space for negotiation by the skilful preacher as visual cues provide an immediate feedback on how his homiletic and pedagogical skills fare with the congregation. The specific focus of these sermons depended on the preachers for the day but they generally drew from a pool of familiar Adventist doctrines and ethical concerns - the imminent return of Christ, the spiritual significance of a distinctive Christian lifestyle as mediated through the SDA prescriptions on health and dressing, and the everyday opportuneness of evangelism and missions. These sermons were liberally peppered with illustrative anecdotes and the biographies of various Adventist personalities.

Because of the proximity of the building to the main thoroughfare and a major highway, the preacher also has to contend with the background cacophony of heavy traffic. Frequently, this would be aggravated by loud and intrusive clanking sounds and radio music from the adjoining metal workshop despite past repeated requests by the pastor to abstain from work during this portion of the day. Moreover, by this time of the morning, the combined heat and humidity of the late morning tropical sun - intensified further by the low ceiling and the ineffective ventilation of two small fans - visibly strains the attention span of many of the congregants. Body postures slacken, hands and feet fidget, gazes wander or become glazed, and a few even nod off to sleep momentarily. If the sermons exceeded 40 minutes, many would repeatedly turn their heads quickly round to check the

time with the wall clock hung over the doorway, signalling to the alert preacher that it would be wise to conclude soon. After the sermon, another signature hymn is sung followed quickly by a closing prayer said by the pastor or preacher. The termination of the Sabbath service is marked by the synchronised uttering of the "Lord's Prayer". After a brief period of silence, the congregation files out of the building onto the porch.

Outside, the mood changes dramatically. The visibly gendered spaces so prominently marked inside collapse and are reopened for individual management and manoeuvre. There is now face-to-face social interaction, relatively freer bodily movement, and light-hearted conversation. Shaking hands and greetings of "Happy Sabbath" are conspicuously exchanged although they are also not indiscriminately shared. Whilst married men and women freely interact with one another, unmarried young adults and teenagers are, by contrast, hesitant and maintain a shy distance from one another. Tending to congregate in small clusters to converse with one another and with furtive glances thrown at the opposite sex, very few breach this divide. However, as an "outsider" I was above these strictures and consequently I was often sought out for hearty handshakes by both sexes. The few female teenagers that plucked up the courage to speak briefly to me were also subjected to teasing looks and remarks uttered within earshot.

The visiting evangelist, and negotiating with the "outside"

As mentioned earlier, except for special occasions the ritual format outlined above was routinely kept. One such key event was the presence of a visiting evangelist from India, Pastor Joshua. For two weeks, he was not only to be the speaker for the annual evangelistic rally but also for the church youth camp that followed. In SDA parlance, they were "outreach" and "inreach" programmes respectively. A week before, a prominent banner (with Tamil script) was hung in front of the building to publicise the week-long event and to attract potential converts. The attendances for these nightly meetings over the week, however, turned out to be disappointingly sparse and were mostly made up of current SDA members.

For the Sabbath worship that weekend, a number of significant innovations were made. The "testimony" section was suspended and replaced by a prolonged singing session keenly led by the youths. Song sheets with new tunes had been specially photocopied and distributed for this purpose. The choir numbers were enlarged with temporary recruits,

and an electric guitar and casiotone synthesiser had been borrowed for the occasion. Although the youths were enthused over the responsibility handed over to them, the musicians seemed ill acquainted with the instruments and with the new songs chosen. Their musical improvisations were discordant against the tunes, and the volume of the instruments repeatedly overwhelmed human voices.

In the hour long sermon given by Pastor Joshua, the congregation was treated to the performance of an accomplished speaker. His whole body became an instrument of communication as he interlaced his delivery with short musical tunes, skilfully modulated his voice, and gesticulated artfully to extract the full attention of his listeners. The opportuneness of the situation was not lost to one of the church leaders. Quite early in the sermon, he increased exponentially the amplification of the public address system. Pastor Joshua's already powerful voice, thus, did not only reverberate within the church walls but was audibly projected beyond to the neighbouring vicinity to catch the interest of nearby Indian residents and passers-by, and to compensate for the sparse attendance's at the night meetings with an imagined wider audience.

Earlier, during the Sabbath class, Pastor Joshua had opted to join the youth group and explained that he had done so "because the youths are the future of the church". To personalise his encounter, he began by asking for each youth's name and made salutary comments about the significance of each one of them. With the preliminaries settled, he then posed the engaging question, "what are the three greatest gifts that God has given to all people?". After various answers attempted by the youths failed to provide the "correct" answer, he began a short monologue on "the greatest gifts of God" with each facet revealed in stages. Pastor Joshua stressed that these were lessons learnt through many years of searching, and which he had wished somebody had imparted to him much earlier. "Time and tide waits for no man" and a few other similar aphorisms were given as substantive proofs that it was imperative that youths learnt to maximise their productive time in the arenas of work and study.¹¹ In a similar vein, "talent" was to be indiscriminately found in every individual but the quest was to discover what they were for each person. The range of "talent" was diverse - being good at studying, singing, playing a musical instrument, preaching - but it was qualitatively present nevertheless. The last of the triad of God-given gifts was "money". More specifically, it was the opportunity given by God for anyone to amass "money" if certain attitudinal changes were nurtured by the individual.

Pastor Joshua's aphorisms and formulations readily bring to mind Weber's notion of the "Protestant ethic" with his emphasis on the moral correctness and providential benefits of hard work. According to Weber (1930), it was the "inner-worldly asceticism" of Calvinism which had provided the seedbed for the formation of the "rational spirit" of modern capitalism. In the squatter church, however, this sketch of a social landscape with surmountable encumbrances was presented in a context where there are strong linkages to material poverty, crime and social alienation, Pastor Joshua arguably saw his task as socialising young persons to meet their responsibilities regarding work, family, the law, and society. A work ethic privileging a social organisation of meaning founded on divine rationality and causality was crafted against a perceived circular culture of poverty and hopelessness. Ironically, the values of discipline, of self-realisation through work, and peaceful acceptance are the values that are most desired by factory management. Nevertheless, despite the intended moral force of his utterances, the responses of his hearers moved along a different path. Further clarifications were not sought on the topic at hand. Instead, the youths wanted to explore the more mundane concerns of everyday sociality. The first cluster of questions revolved around commensality, on whether it was permissible to consume food prepared in conjunction with the religious festivals of other faiths (particularly Deepavali). A similar theme was reiterated for another train of queries that sought Pastor Joshua's views on the legitimacy of being a non-participating spectator at religious festivals (like Thaipusam). In both instances, a forthright either-or answer was deftly avoided. Pastor Joshua spoke at length to distinguish carefully between the intentionality and ignorance of individual actions. For instance, whilst he stated categorically that a Christian should not knowingly consume food that has been offered to idols earlier, he also noted that not all food offered by hosts should be automatically consigned to this category. Witnessing religious festivals, by contrast, involved a more mixed bundle of agencies and motives. The veracity of competing deities and divine cosmologies was denied but a caveat was also attached. To be a spectator repeatedly at these festivities would have bad influences on their spiritual health ("it is alright to be curious and see these festivities once but don't keep on going over and over again"). Prolonged visual interaction with an alien spiritual agency was regarded as tempting malevolent forces in spite of the intensity and sincerity of one's personal religious allegiance.

In a conversation with a SDA pastor on a different occasion, I had posed similar questions on the topics of food and religious festivities. Pastor James regarded the

commemoration of festivities in the manner of the Roman Catholic Church as largely irrelevant and, in some instances, as illegitimately syncretistic - "the Catholics even celebrate *ponggal* just like Hindus!". As a counterpoint, "celebrating the Sabbath 52 times a year" was cited as an exceedingly superior religious practice. In the SDA's religious calendar, the only "holy day" recognised and affirmed is the Sabbath, and celebratory elements are construed more within the austere framework of spiritual worship rather than in boisterous and seasonally-tied activities. Partly, the SDA Church's ambivalent stance towards the Roman Catholic Church can be traced to anti-Papacy feelings generated in mid-nineteenth century North America with the large influx of European Catholic immigrants who were regarded as disrupting the established Puritan religious landscape. More generally, Catholics have been a favourite target for evangelists because of their perceived syncretistic religious practices and weak emphasis on the central authority of scriptures. Indeed, a number of the SDAs that I spoke to said that they originated from Roman Catholic backgrounds. Pastor James himself described his voluntary conversion at the young age of 14 years from a Methodist-Roman Catholic family. By the age of 21, he had undergone the mandatory theological training in India and has been pastoring in numerous churches since then.

The sociality of food proved a more slippery problem to negotiate. Once again, an explicit principle of not knowingly consuming any food which had been offered to Hindu deities earlier was underlined. However, he conceded that over the years in the course of moving largely within Adventist circles, this dilemma had become personally unimportant as he has hardly any Hindu acquaintances left. For ordinary SDAs who have Hindu relatives and family members within the same household, the dilemma is protracted and assumes a more intimate level. One of the youths, in fact, spoke unhappily of ill-feelings between various of her relatives due to concerted attempts and taunts in getting these individuals to return to being Hindus. For the SDAs, being a Christian has the additional responsibility of adhering to food restrictions. But Pastor James maintained that SDAs should not waver and keep a firm stance. Efforts should not be spared to explain to non-SDA family members and acquaintances of the spiritual significance of food. In his pastoral experience, he found that some understanding and sympathy could be elicited if an analogy is made with the Islamic injunction against non-*halal* food. To avoid consuming food that might be offered to deities, the homes of relatives and friends could be deliberately visited just prior to or after these religious celebrations. In this way, it is hoped that social ties and a sense of conviviality would be maintained.

Against the temporal grain: "Keeping the Sabbath"

Congregational visibility and unity through weekly attendances for worship is a salient emphasis of Christian teachings across the denominational and theological spectrum. Constituting the "body of Christ" in this symbolic manner is imputed not only as integral for individual spiritual edification but also for the equally important purpose of a witnessing corporate community. For the SDA denomination, this formulation is further informed by sabbatarianism which has practices contrary to mainstream Christian custom and established norms. To detractors, these practices are regarded as archaic and unnecessarily heralding back to Judaism.¹² For SDAs, "keeping the Sabbath" entails breaking the flow of routine everyday activities in order to remember the "holy time" of God. As explained in the SDA Yearbook, "the fourth commandment of God's unchangeable law requires the observance of this seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest, worship, and ministry in harmony with the teaching and practice of Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath" (*Seventh-Day Adventist Yearbook* [hereafter SDA Y] 1994:7). Furthermore, keeping the seventh day of the week separate from normal time is imputed with a moral quality in the light of the SDA's traditional exegesis of Revelations 12-14 which places the church as a faithful bearer of the three angels' messages of the second advent of Christ. Viewed through these prophecies, the dominant practice of Sunday observance instituted by the Roman Catholic Papacy is viewed as a distinguishing mark between those who follow the sign of Satan's authority and those who keep true to God's commandment about the Sabbath (Neufeld 1976:1237ff).

The edges of the Sabbath are reckoned to be bounded between sunset Friday and sunset Saturday, and between these points in time SDA members are expected to be engaged in worship, study of the bible, visiting the sick, doing evangelistic works, and to refrain from "secular reading" or listening to "secular radio broadcasts". Public worship during the Sabbath period is normally held on a Saturday, a practice which attracted the derogatory term "Saturday God" appended to the SDA denomination. Adventist history textbooks relate in some detail the discrimination that the church faced in American society in "keeping the Sabbath". This subsequently provided the impetus for promoting religious liberty in their overseas mission work.¹³ Nonetheless, in Malaysia, the problems encountered in "keeping the Sabbath" are still recurrent as evident in issues of *The Messenger*. Successful testimonies of individuals ranging from school children to working adults refusing to compromise on this matter are frequently highlighted to denote both the

resolve of these individuals and the disadvantaged circumstances in which SDA members are embedded. In a bureaucratically time-conscious milieu which operates on a discordant chronological regime, dismissal from jobs and curtailment of a career by employers are palpable possibilities. Whilst SDA members in Western countries might have the option of legal recourse, nobody in Kampung Nehru that I spoke to would seriously consider pursuing this avenue of action. Adopting an overt defiance to any form of discriminatory employment is evaluated as a "no-win" situation involving a loss of valuable time and money. Apart from seeking a more sympathetic employer or favourable working environment, various ways of negotiation and coping are attempted. For instance, senior pastors would write letters seeking concessions from employers or, alternatively, individual SDA members would try to get the cooperation of colleagues in time scheduling especially in factory shift work. For those with enough finance, self-employment is another attractive possibility.

When tensions and conflicts arise, they are refracted through the prism of faith and interpreted as divinely-mediated occasions for strengthening one's belief and trust in God. This was apparent in the experience of Sunthar, an 18-year old male youth. Fresh out of secondary school he had just landed his first job on a factory assembly line. Not long after I had made his acquaintance, he told me one morning that he had to cease working because of his resolve in "keeping the Sabbath". About two weeks later, he sought me out to relate the good news that he had found employment again in another factory and that his new salary was even better. With an obvious sense of relief and happiness, he reflected, "God really cares and will provide for all our needs if we trust in him". Pastor Isaiah did concede, however, that in his many years of ministry, this is not the prevailing pattern. Members had sometimes to be disciplined for being lax in "keeping the Sabbath" or, for more recalcitrant cases, "disfellowshipped" - barred from worshipping in the church. He also knew of members who had chosen to shift their religious allegiance to another less problematic Protestant denomination like the Methodist and Lutheran churches, or, in more severe cases, had dropped out of institutional Christianity entirely. Losses like these are symbolically offset through the stock of testimonies in which the SDA's distinctive emphasis on "keeping the Sabbath" are portrayed as not a religious liability but, on the contrary, the very feature that attracts converts from other Christian denominations. The non-Adventist churches are faulted for their exegetical errors of the relevant biblical passages or, more forcefully, as deliberately subverting the unchanging commandments of God. The critique is double-edged; "keeping the Sabbath" is a vital indicator of a host of

disciplines that marks and justifies separateness from a perceived hostile environment, and obversely as indexing a faith that has gone astray through wilful neglect and distortion.

Exhibiting and maintaining differences

The SDA notion of the sacred not only includes ritually marked-off spaces and time but there is also a feature of bodily maintenance through the medium of dress codes and dietary taboos. Human bodies, unlike the notion of "societies", are highly visible, tangible and mappable sites of social activities. At a cursory level, this is strikingly evident when the conduct of worship by the key persons in the *kovil* and the church are juxtaposed. Whilst the Hindu *pujari* is typically semi-clothed with a *vesti* and marked with sacred ash striations on his torso and forehead, the SDA pastor is fully clothed in Western garb - light-coloured long-sleeved shirts, trousers, necktie and a wrist-watch.

SDA church life in Kampung Nehru is frequently described with reference to authoritative texts, personalities, and events. Conversational pieces were liberally peppered with citations and insights into various scriptural passages, the names of American Adventists, and personal achievements whether in terms of the number of converts garnered or the amount of literature distributed and sold. Often when I sought further details, a tract or an author would be referred to. For instance, when I inquired about the SDA Church's stance on health, a large manual entitled, *Seventh-Day Adventists Believe...A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (hereafter SDAB) and published in the USA was produced for my perusal. In the manual, the chapter on "Christian Behaviour" provides pertinent insights into the significance of its beliefs and practices on clothing, and its expressed aim of inculcating a universal set of aesthetic values across localised cultural boundaries.¹⁴ The chapter prefaces its central argument by stressing that there is a need to build a social body of Christians as opposed to "a collection of atomised individuals, each of whom goes his or her own way without taking any responsibility for one's fellows or accepting any concern for them" (SDAB 1988:280). Although Christian behaviour is regarded as a natural fruit of salvation, and therefore independent of salvatory value, the authors, nonetheless, counselled for the need of a minimal adherence to God's laws of health as the human body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19).

According to the manual, the choices of clothing should follow the principles of "simplicity, modesty, practicality, health and attractiveness" (Ibid.:286). Interlacing its

argument with various scriptural texts for support, the *raison d'être* of a "simplicity of lifestyle and appearance" is to set "Christians in stark contrast to the greed, materialism, and gaudiness of pagan, twentieth-century society, where values focus on material things rather than on people" (Ibid.:287).¹⁵ Translated into everyday living, this entails abstinence from wearing "rings, earrings, necklaces, and bracelets, and showy tie tacks, cufflinks, and pins and any other type of jewellery that has as its main function display" (Ibid.:287). It was also explained to me that the conventional practice of wearing a cross¹⁶ as a visible sign of one's faith was discouraged for the purpose of mitigating "idolatry".

In Kampung Nehru, these proscriptions were adhered to although local cultural variations were also practised. For instance, before entering the church sanctuary all footwear was removed and left outside on the porch, and people walked around either barefoot or with socks on. Whilst men overwhelmingly adopted a western-type dress convention, women wore a range of Indian *saris*, loose-fitting *churidar*, *salvar* and *kammis* traditional dresses. The colours chosen were significantly mono-tonal and subdued rather than brightly multi-coloured materials. The symbolic capital of dressing also extended to bodily dispositions and forms of address. As described in an earlier section, when Sabbath worship began, devotees became largely immobile and confined to their seats. Ideally, body postures were not to slacken, and hand gestures and movements were to be controlled and deliberate. When adult devotees greeted one another, English terms of address were used ("Mr", "Mrs" etc.) to suggest a veneer of egalitarianism and conversations were conducted with an eye to decorum.

Reading and ranking a person through dressing provides a clue to how people attend to one another on a day-to-day basis, and how attempts at demarcating identity and status are recognised and evaluated. In Kampung Nehru, such a mode of relating was especially significant. Some Hindu residents that I spoke to expressed an awareness of the SDA's meticulous attention to dressing, health and manner of social interaction. Perhaps the most barbed and revealing was articulated by Subramaniam in one of our numerous evening conversations. We had been talking about the imminent erasure of Kampung Nehru and the general state of apathy and the piecemeal responses that seem to envelop the settlement as a whole. When I asked whether leaders in other religious groups in the settlement shared the same kind of sentiments, he remarked that "[Indian] Christians dress to show off their superiority, to attract women and also to try to convert people but they don't get involved in the struggles of the *kampung*", adding that "when people become rich,

they can't think properly".

To be sure, amongst the Hindu residents in Kampung Nehru varied views about the significance of dressing arose as well. When devotees appeared in the Mariyamman *kovil* for the Friday *puja* and especially for the calendrical festivities, a few unmarried working women and female teenagers were attired in *sari* and sometimes adorned with costume jewellery and other finery. In comparison, housewives and elderly women were more casually dressed. Besides wearing the traditional Indian *sari*, the Malay *sarong* with a blouse or simply a one piece loose-fitting dress easily available at the *pasar malam* were also worn. In a casual conversation during one of these festivities, Samy attributed female "overdressing" to relative seclusion and lack of mobility. Festivities, temple *puja* and similar public occasions were read as strategic opportunities to attract male attention. This perception, echoed by a number of other young Indian men was often a moot point for teasing and lewd discussions. In turn, a small number of vocal women also used commentaries on dressing as a way of evaluating the social and moral status of their tormentors. Of this, Packiam's observations were perhaps the most incisive. "They dress like ruffians for temple *puja* and show that they don't understand the real spiritual meaning of proper dressing".

Likewise, food consumption and commensality have ideological dimensions as well. They can be used to reflect social status and to mark off social boundaries. For the SDA Church, in contradistinction to mainstream Christianity, the dietary laws as embodied in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy are regarded as efficacious and obligatory. Briefly, these laws distinguish between ritually "clean" and "unclean" animals, and the consumption of "unclean animals" is proscribed. To textually substantiate this stricture, the manual also contains a lengthy endnote which disproves the prevailing Christian gastronomic formulation that this distinction was abolished by Jesus (Mark 7:19), by Peter's vision (Acts 10) and the apostle Paul (Romans 14:1; 1 Corinthians 8:14; 10:25-28). For the SDA, health has explicitly a spiritual policing function - "to protect the command centre of body temples, the mind, and the dwelling place of the Spirit of Christ" (SDAB 1988:280).

Modern science is additionally invoked as an ally and the prescience of Adventist health wisdom is given play as the findings of scientific research putatively confirm that American SDAs are "less likely than the general population to develop almost any of the major diseases" (Ibid.:280). Animal products (especially "unclean animals") are reported to

have a high proportion of toxins, contaminants and are "more apt to be carriers of disease". To introduce them into the "body temple where God's Spirit dwells is less than God's ideal". The ideal ("the original diet as ordained in the Garden of Eden") is a vegetarian diet but it was conceded that in the absence of the ideal and "those who wish to stay in optimum health will eat the best food that they can obtain" (Ibid.:285). Moreover, food should be prepared in a simple and natural way. The continual use of condiments and spices supposedly "irritate the digestive tract" and they are "associated with a number of health problems" (Ibid.:286).¹⁷ Pastors are especially advised to pay particular attention to their diet and health as "you may be able to hide many things about your personal life [but] being overweight is not one of them. When your appearance disagrees with your doctrine, it is embarrassing to teach and preach temperance and self-discipline" (*Seventh-Day Adventist Minister's Manual* 1992:35).

SDA pastors also regarded with apparent nonchalance the widely reported phenomenon of miraculous bodily healing in charismatic rallies and churches. Whilst care was taken not to belittle these healings, it was maintained that their SDA church membership has not been adversely affected because they are not easily influenced by sensationalist "short term healing". The SDA health teachings are not only based "solidly on the Bible", "holistic" but are vindicated by the findings of modern science.¹⁸

SDA bodily maintenance extended to the fruit of waged human labour - money. In the absence of a substantial body of members, the numerical disadvantage is pragmatically offset by a disciplined and a regular flow of monetary offerings. In my conversations with SDA pastors, it was impressed upon me that the SDA has a unique fiscal formula with respect to monetary offerings and to its budgeted expenditure applicable everywhere throughout the world. This formula is characterised as "biblically based" and as actually "returning to God what he has in fact provided for each member". Termed "The Lord's Tithe", church members are morally enjoined to contribute 10 percent of their monthly income for "supporting the gospel ministry of my local mission and the world church". Of this amount, 59 percent is apportioned to the local mission, 10 percent to the union, 20 percent to the division and 11 percent to the retirement fund.¹⁹ Each member, moreover, sets aside "freewill offerings" for a list of local church, local mission, and world church projects. A second 10 percent is recommended for this offering.

To keep a close surveillance of these offerings, a small white printed envelope with

columns for itemised details and personal particulars are provided. During the context of Sabbath worship, time is deliberately set aside to allow these envelopes to be deposited into a transparent box. In the brief interim period between the conclusion of the Sabbath class and the commencement of the Sabbath worship, as if in reciprocation, the church treasurer conspicuously distributes official receipts to the previous week's collection. Through this ritual act of monetary offerings an imagined shared space is sketched that interpenetrates between the local and the global dimensions of the SDA church. Money in this fictive territory becomes the symbolic and elastic medium of establishing an egalitarian flow of resources. Some SDA devotees were thus able to speak with a sense of achievement of their meagre monetary offerings contributing to various projects being conducted in a far-away place. Over and above this conspicuous gifting were also anonymous offerings for specifically local use made within the context of weekly Sabbath worship and Sabbath classes. Additionally, in anticipation of the erection of a building in the new site offered by the developers, a systematic pledging system had been set up. The "Building Fund Chart" correlated individual and, in some cases, family names with the amount pledged.²⁰

Evangelism in the SDA context is closely tied to literature, a feature carried over from its labour-intensive days of "colporteurism". In my conversations with SDA devotees at Kampung Nehru, the phrase "Voice of Prophecy" (VOP) was repeatedly used. When I first expressed ignorance of its significance, a few publicity tracts were quickly brought to me for perusal. The VOP is a correspondence course offered in three languages (English, Malay and Tamil) "free of charge" and without "any obligation" to the inquirer interested in finding the solutions to health, emotional and spiritual dilemmas. The course is structured along an unfolding scheme with set passages and questions for the correspondent to read and answer. As the course progresses, Adventist perspectives become prominent and the correspondent is eventually invited to embrace the faith.

In the North American context, the VOP originally began as a religious radio broadcast in 1929. By 1943, it had crossed national boundaries, and Spanish and Portuguese programmes were relayed to Central and South American countries. Subsequently, the VOP branched into a Bible Correspondence course for alcoholics. In Singapore, the setting up of the VOP course in 1949 is credited to Pastor Henry Peterson who had experiences in a similar programme in New York City. The 36 Bible lessons course was in English initially but shortly after Chinese and Romanised Malay were introduced as well. The latter, in particular, aroused a spate of strong opposition and controversy from the Singapore Malay

community which spilled over in the local newspapers (Ng 1984:40f).²¹ Although they were directed to Malay-speaking Chinese *Babas* as well, a number of Muslim Malays were reported to have enlisted on the course and some eventually converted to SDA beliefs. Coupled with an ongoing programme of evangelistic meetings, these lessons are cited as particularly instrumental in the setting up of a Malay-speaking church in Singapore as early as 1949. Although the reported numbers of conversion were consistently small with many relapses, evangelistic efforts amongst the Singapore Malay Muslims in the 1950s and early 1960s continued unabated. A number of testimonies given by Malay converts in *The Messenger* identified the VOP as allowing them to come into contact with the "plan of salvation" otherwise not possible in ordinary public social interaction.

As in other testimonies of SDA converts - which included non-Christians and Christians from other denominations - the discovery of the truth of keeping the Sabbath, initial hostility from friends, family and employers, and the inculcation of healthier habits are recurring themes in this genre. But not all those who embarked on the VOP had religious motives at the outset. When some VOP correspondents were unexpectedly visited in the mid-1960s, it was discovered that they were often "adult Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus or Christians who have studied the lessons in the hope of getting something for nothing; jobless people who felt the VOP course might qualify them for a job. Then there are the teenagers who are attracted by a colourful diploma to hang on the wall as a room decoration".²² Notwithstanding these drawbacks, the VOP and the Sabbath classes continue to be the main avenues for evangelistic outreach.

In Malaysia, as elsewhere, the boundaries of vernacular evangelism as the sole domain of Christian missionary organisations have broadened and other religious groups have liberally appropriated these methods for their own respective projects. For example, the reported appeal and success of the VOP course had prompted the Hindu Sangam to conduct a Hinduism correspondence course expressly modelled on it. But if the objectives of communicating these religious messages have remained relatively constant, the medium for this activity has evolved in leaps and bounds. The latest audio, visual and print technology has been conscripted to keep up with the changing aesthetic tastes and idioms of the urban clientele.²³ Put differently, the vernacular translation of the sacred is conducted in a public realm that resonates with a religious market of consumption. In congested public spaces - in bus stations, road stalls or in street corners - vendors offer a myriad of tracts, audio tapes, videos, calligraphy and books spanning the religious

spectrum for sale or free distribution. By and large, however, Islamic literature predominates.

In the vicinity around Kampung Nehru, where the Malay-Muslim populace was more numerous, this was apparent in the weekly *pasar malam*. Some Islamic literature distributed was theologically heterodox, and reflected the positions of fringe Islamic groups critical of a mainstream state-sponsored Islam. Before a widely publicised nation-wide crackdown on *Darul Arqam* (in August 1995), their literature and products were freely marketed and, according to some of my informants, widely purchased and read. Even in the aftermath of their delegitimation as a *bona-fide* Islamic group, local residents spoke with guarded appreciation of the manner in which they had successfully forged a self-reliant and "grassroots" approach to development through a network of schools and factories producing *halal* food and toiletries.²⁴

Conclusion

At the beginning of this century, the SDA's aggressive canvassing of their literature attracted the watchful eye of more established Christian missions in British Malaya and Singapore. Leaders of Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Methodist denominations warned their congregations and students in mission schools about the SDA's proselytisation efforts. Perhaps aptly depicting this tone was the report submitted by a Methodist church worker:

we had a hard time last year owing to the disturbances caused by the SDAs who secretly disseminated their pernicious doctrines among our people. They succeeded in ridding us of some unstable and disgruntled ones...We would warn all to beware of their smiles, for so far they have come among us as wolves in sheep's clothing (cited in Ng 1984:7).

For adherents of mainstream Christian denominations not familiar with the intricacies of theological and historical debates, the SDA's ambivalent image and status as a deviant "sect" has largely remained although the efflorescence of independent and charismatic Protestant Christian groups in recent decades has arguably mitigated the imputed sense of liminal "danger". At the same time, sections of the SDA leadership has displayed a discernible move towards portraying a more modernist interpretation of certain traditional emphases of Adventism. Capitalising on their prescient scientific wisdom of the Adventist preoccupation with health and dietary habits is a case in point.

However, how do these trends intersect in the ambience of a working class urban squatter *kampung*? What kind of cognitive maps are specifically promoted to carve out an identity that is ideologically and culturally distinct from other groupings? Given the constraints on fieldwork, this chapter has attempted to provide a partial answer to these questions through an ethnographic description of its ritual practices.

Following the lead suggested by Durkheim, many scholars have found rituals and rites to be a fertile field for examining the manner in which they mediate between the "sacred" and "profane" spheres of human existence.²⁵ As rule-bound and formalised public events, religious rituals and performances are apt vehicles for communicating and translating aspects of abstract theological formulations. At the same time, these events do not prevent nor restrict individuals from imputing their own idiosyncratic meanings or attend to their emotional, psychological and social needs. In ritual activity, participants characteristically do not present themselves as authors of the significations and patterns of action deployed. Authorship instead is located external to these agents and activity, in "a river of tradition" (e.g., sacred texts, divinities or other extra-human agencies). Overdetermined, full of redundancy, repetition and exaggeration, ritual behaviour can be understood as symbolic activity giving a commentary on individual and collective anxieties even as it helps people avoid too direct a confrontation with these events. It provides a respite from the ambiguities and contradictions of everyday living.

Amongst others, Jean Comaroff (1985,1994) has questioned functionalist perspectives on ritual (and by implication, "religion") which undervalue the significance of a "timeless" and ahistorical tenor to ritual behaviour. Instead, she argues that it is precisely this "timeless" referent escaping mundane existence that allows extensive claims to be possible, and present limits on agency to be transgressed. Understood in this way, ritual has the potential not only to comment on prevailing culture but also to change it.

The potency of SDA ritual life can also be gleaned from aspects of Bourdieu's theory of practice as clustered under the concept of *habitus* (see Introduction). In opposition to positivist materialistic and intellectualist idealist approaches, Bourdieu (1990) argues that knowledge and dispositions are constituted in practice, and are always oriented towards practical functions. *Habitus* is thus both a product as well as a producer of history. Individual and collective practices are generated and reproduced by the active presence of past experiences in which "schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee

the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms" (Ibid.:54). The most improbable practices are, therefore excluded as unthinkable, and these agents are inclined "to make a virtue of necessity and to refuse what is anyway denied and will the inevitable" (Ibid.:53). *Habitus* encompasses further the notion of "choices" which are "embodied" and turned into postures and dispositions of the body. Values become postures, gestures, ways of standing, walking, and speaking. In short, it is morality made flesh. Like material property, Bourdieu also suggests that in order for a "field" to function there have to be people that are prepared to play the game according to its rules. Coupled with the notion of a *habitus* then is a linguistic market which, following the analogue of the market, has receivers of utterances being capable of assessing, evaluating and setting a price on them. At the same time, both agents and institutions in this field are engaged in struggle albeit with unequal strengths. In accordance with the rules constituting the field of play, they compete to appropriate the specific profits at stake in the game.

The preceding chapters have sketched a locality where everyday social spaces are imprinted with competing social meanings and differential symbolic capital. These meanings are not inherent but socially organised, learnt and accumulated over time through ritual-like repetition, street-wise experiences and commonsensical urban etiquette. This chapter has further illustrated that in the domain of "sacred" spaces, devotees imbibe, appropriate and reproduce a localised version of a corpus of immanent knowledge and durable disposition which is aligned with a globalised SDA *habitus* through imitation, study and reiteration. SDAs are constituted as an imagined egalitarian social body marked by a coherent set of social meanings, ethical practices, and essentialising categories that ritually sets them apart. Uniformised movements, standardised forms of address, and a dress code are disciplinary devices that reinforce a sense of a cohesive community as well as shape an acquiescence to an authoritative structure. A simplified, rationalised, orderly and predictable moral order is juxtaposed to the social flux, political uncertainties and promiscuity of modern urban living. By situating the individual member within a coherent social and moral community, a discernible shape is poised against a fluid social world. The SDA's measured and orderly use of space within the church premises strikingly replicates and reinforces this cosmology.

In a similar vein, ritual behaviour requires that time can be segmented, measured, and evaluated differently. "Sabbath worship" is "sacred" time separated from and

juxtaposed with "profane" time. In the SDA church in the *kampung*, I have suggested how its characteristic emphasis has striking parallels with the clock-time discipline of industrial capitalism. The notion of time as linear, abstract, and quantifiable is underlined. Because it is measured and evaluated independently of concrete events and circumstances, time then acquires the added quality of being "saved" or "lost" dependent on the attitudes and everyday practices of the individual.

By the same token, although espousing an ideology of apolitical millennialism, SDAs in practice selectively appropriate from dominant culture particularly as they pertain to avenues for enhancing social status and upward mobility. To be sure, the SDA's particular brand of Protestant Christianity resonates with features of present-day "fundamentalist" Christian groups with their emphasis on "the gospel of prosperity". Whilst their origins are traceable to the historical specificities of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century North America, local contexts and circumstances culturally translate these historical narratives.²⁶ An insistence on institutional separatism, on bodily disciplines, and on deferring to certain doctrinal tenets underlines their unique ideological position in a coded temporal map of history. At the same time, fundamentalist discourse characteristically privileges written texts and imputes a rationalist, schematic and dispensationalist reading of them. Guidance on beliefs and practices are drawn from and evaluated against selective key passages of the Bible as well as the writings of pioneers of the SDA.

In the light of the above, it would be tempting to construe the SDA's stock of beliefs and practices as merely the marks of a repressive ideology that defines and confines individuals. This approach would miss the productive aspects of a Foucaultian perspective on power-knowledge or the "correctness" of its *habitus*. The Bible is read "plainly" or "literally" because the distinction between text and interpretation is effaced. The discursive spaces created allow adherents to map and reimagine a mode of existence in a manner that their lives have meaning, dignity and direction. In drawing sharp categorical differences between "insiders" and "outsiders" in their own terms, the SDA as an institution and at a personal level retains control and authorship of its distinctive ideas and practices vis-à-vis competing accounts of the moral landscape. Understanding ritual practices in this way mitigates a determinist and reductionist view of social action. Whilst there is certainly an element of a ritualisation of an ideology masking the inequalities of everyday life and an exclusionary idealised version of a community (e.g., see Bloch 1989), this process is not

necessarily a foreclosed conclusion. As I have alluded to, social actors are also interpreters who make tactical appropriations whenever possible (de Certeau 1984). The domain of ritual, despite its ahistorical and cosmological tenor, is necessarily situated within a historical force field, and bears the marks of contextual social forces and contending social agents.

The task of maintaining a hermetically sealed discursive universe is thus necessarily imperfect. Fissures and spill-overs from other equally fluid domains complicates its moral project. As a minority embedded in a larger "force field" of competing moral universes, these SDA practices are constantly open to question and subversion by non-practitioners. Even as SDA pastors and leaders attempt to patrol the boundaries to minimise syncretism and membership losses to other belief systems and social groups, focusing on these conundrums can unwittingly raise more queries. They illustrate what Sallnow (1989:254) as noted in another instance where social *praxis* is never totally enclosed by ideologies: "in the real world of historical subjects, it overruns its constitutive boundaries and begins to recover the ambivalences and ambiguities that its cultural representation abrogates". In the SDA church in Kampung Nehru, this is most evident in the kind of concerns raised by youths which expresses their incomplete incorporation into the SDA *habitus* at this stage of their lives. But, as I have also illustrated, whilst devotees may be constituted as a coherent body of believers at the site of worship, the social realities of everyday interaction with families and friends prevent a complete closure of this ideological space.

In Kampung Nehru, the SDA's ideology of place is framed and animated by categories of difference and oppositions to a "pagan" and "hostile" world. Unlike the Hindu Tamil devotees of the Mariyamman *kovil* who are more numerous in the *kampung*, and have ambivalent patronage relationships with MIC politics and politicians, the SDA church, constituted largely by minority and culturally distinct Telegus, is wilfully detached from these processes. Its legitimacy and prestige as a moral community is drawn instead from an imagined global solidarity of like-minded individuals reiterated not only ritually but also through its reference to the plethora of publications and global network of institutions. In comparison to devotees of Mariyamman which make the locality "habitable" through stamping a group biography through the *kovil*'s many religious festivities, SDAs do so by being constituted as a regular congregation of individuals in an enclosed space. Put differently, its collective identity is largely a play of inner differentiated spaces. Feelings of

disquiet are pastorally turned inwards, deferred, and evaluated against an Adventist temposcape. Seen through this prism, it is perhaps not paradoxical that the church's imminent eviction and offer of an alternative site of titled land is viewed in providential and optimistic terms. Whilst they may not as yet ^{have} entered into the millennialist heavens with Christ, the promise of a fixed place of worship after years of unsettled movement and uncertainty, nevertheless, goes far to strengthen their faith in their particular version of divine providence.

NOTES

1. There is a corpus of studies on Christianity in Malaysia. Most relevant to this thesis are Daniel 1992, Haines 1962, Hunt *et al* 1992, O'Sullivan 1987, Sng 1993, and Thomas 1978.
2. Literature on the SDA is plentiful and is mostly authored by Adventist scholars. Apart from a random reading of articles in Adventist theological journals and the regional newsletter, *The Messenger*, the following were particularly helpful to this thesis: Butler 1974, Knight 1993, Land 1986, Neufeld 1976, and Schwarz 1979. For other relevant studies of Christian millenarianism, see Harrison 1979, Marsden 1980, and Sandeen 1970.
3. The term "millennialism" was invented in the 1840s (Hutchison 1987). More specifically, there are two kinds of millennial approaches to looking at biblical prophecies. Premillennialism places the return of Christ, along with other cataclysmic events, at the start of a glorious age of history. A postmillennial scheme, in comparison, places them at the end of this thousand-year period. Coupled with a dispensationist view of history in which apparently plotless events unfold according to various coded signs, its adherents are predisposed to read newspapers and happenings with an "insider" knowledge that would be denied to "outsiders". Additionally, this kind of privileged knowledge provides "insiders" a psychological strength disproportionate to their small numbers.
4. For years after "The Great Disappointment" of 1844, the core of followers who eventually constituted themselves into the SDA had pursued a radically apolitical expression of millennialism. By the 1870s, faced with the prospect of decimation its "shut door" doctrine was revised towards an "open door" stance which galvanised the sending of missionaries outside of North America.

In 1863, the year in which the SDA was officially organised in North America, about 3,500 members and 125 churches were reported. At the time of the death of Ellen White, its foremost figure in 1915, there were 136,000 members. In 1980, membership worldwide grew to 3.5 million with an estimated 85 percent living outside North America. The latest figures culled from the 1994 Yearbook reported about 7.7 million members distributed over 36,000 churches in 204 countries.
5. This was particularly marked in the wake of the Waco (Texas) incident in which Branch Davidians (a splinter group of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church formed in 1959) including children were killed in a standoff with the FBI in February, 1993. Professional

media consultants were hired to distance Seventh-Day Adventism from the Branch Davidians (Lawson 1995). I am grateful to Professor Ronald Lawson for generously sharing with me his papers on Adventism.

6. My estimate is that there are about 1,000 Indian (mainly Tamil and Telegu) members in the SDA out of a total membership of about 3,500 in peninsular Malaysia. Figures for Sarawak and Sabah are 11,000 and 18,000 respectively. Most are indigenous peoples although "outreach" work was initially conducted with urban Chinese at the beginning of the twentieth century.

7. From the early 1980s onwards, there has been a rising chorus of protests vocalised by non-Muslim religious leaders regarding the bureaucratic difficulty of securing permission for erecting places of worship. Many new temples and churches have subsequently been set up in residential estates and shophouses without the relevant approvals. This is related to the disproportionate allocation of land for religious purposes (worship and burial) as outlined in various *Draft Structure Town Plans*. For instance, in the township of Ipoh whilst an allocation ration of 1:800 population and a spatial requirement of 0.6 to 1.0 hectare for mosques is required for new residential areas, the corresponding figures for churches and temples are 1:5000 and 0.4 to 0.8 hectare respectively (*Human Rights in Malaysia* 1985:98ff).

8. In another Protestant squatter church located in a nearby settlement, the building was utilised as a kindergarten and children's day-care centre during weekdays. Wall surfaces were plastered with colourful English nursery rhymes and alphabet charts. The altar section was shielded by a curtain which was only unveiled on Sundays for community worship.

9. Others worked as taxi drivers, cleaners, government employees, or were self-employed in street vending.

10. As in other theologically "conservative" churches, the cultural issue of the ordination of women has been controversial and to date has not being amicably resolved. In the General Conference of 1990, it was reported that whilst the majority of delegates from USA and Western Europe had favoured ordination, they were, nevertheless, out voted by Latin American and African delegates. Adventist women pastors still gained "the right to perform all the essential functions of the ordained minister but without ordination to the gospel ministry" (Knight 1993:127; also see Land 1986:213f).

11. A similar concern with time management was evident in advice given in a ministerial manual: "if you don't know where you are going on a given day, week, or year, how can you enjoy the satisfaction of having gotten there? Planning increases satisfaction...Too many make a career of hunting ants rather than elephants, because they get a quicker kill and thus a higher body count. The most successful are not those who work hard, but those who work hard at hard work" (*Seventh-Day Adventist Minister's Manual* 1992:31f).

12. An Adventist scholar has contended that Sabbatarians were "thoroughly Protestant, and they were thoroughly Puritan. They were motivated by the quest for a biblical faith purged of human accretions and restored to its primitive apostolic purity...[what distinguished] Sabbatarians, however, was a deep conviction that it was necessary to take the arguments which characterised Protestantism and Puritanism to a logical conclusion...The origin of Sunday-keeping to them was post-apostolic and the practice itself extra-biblical" (Ball 1994:10).

13. These tensions came particularly to the fore during wars when conscription was

enforced. Although there were instances where some SDA leaders justified the suspension of the observance of the Sabbath and taking up weapons for the sake of patriotism, there were also numerous cases of conscientious objectors. By the First World War in the USA, the SDA's consistent lobbying had succeeded in these objectors being legally recognised as "noncombatants". A great number were still imprisoned for disobeying officers in keeping to Sabbath observances (see Lawson 1996).

14. In the preface to the SDAB, it was conceded that whilst the present volume is "not an officially stated statement...it may be viewed as representative of 'the truth ...in Jesus (Ephesians 4:21) that the Seventh-Day Adventists around the globe cherish and proclaim". The stated number of "fundamental beliefs" have not however remained static but fluctuated between 22 and 27 over the decades.

15. At the same time, pastors were enjoined to pay close attention to their appearance as "clothing ranks you and your profession. If your dress is second-class compared with other professionals in your community, the community will assume that yours is a second-class profession" (*Seventh-Day Adventist Minister's Manual* 1992:39).

16. Similarly, ongoing debates on the legitimacy of the wedding ring are symptomatic of much of the diversifying and modernising cultural impetus that is occurring within the SDA Church. A purist position, linked to Ellen White, depicts this practice as of "pagan" astrological origin and not conducive for responsible stewardship of resources.

17. On Christmas day, I was invited to have lunch in the home of a SDA youth who lived a few miles away in a low-cost flat. Mercy had been up since early in the morning to help her mother prepare a small selection of dishes. To minimise expenses, she had also baked Milo cookies. I was served curry chicken and *sambal*, both spicy dishes, with rice. It was pointed out that the curry leaves were especially brought from their home state for the occasion.

18. In his study of Christian fundamentalism in South India, Caplan (1987: chps. 7 and 8) has argued that its strong emphasis on miracles resonates closely with the everyday experiences of both marginalised Hindus and Christians. In projecting an extra-human agency that is able to respond powerfully and emotively to afflictions, despair, uncertainty and powerlessness in impersonalised spaces, charismatic discourse overlaps considerably with a pan-Indian cosmology of maleficent and beneficent spirits. Moreover, this phenomenon is juxtaposed to the dominant theological emphasis on the "social gospel" introduced by European missionaries in the early twentieth-century, and favoured by the postcolonial middle-class and elite minority. Appropriating Foucaultian insights, he suggests that the charismatic movement can be read as articulating subjugated but widely held theodicies.

19. Structurally, the SDA is organised hierarchically in terms of concentric circles with the General Conference as the highest legislative body. The local mission refers to the "Peninsula Malaysia Mission" which falls under the "Southeast Asia Union Mission" which, in turn, is territorially subsumed by the "Far Eastern Division".

20. The highest pledge was 700 *ringgit* whilst the lowest was 50 *ringgit*. An overwhelming majority of the 105 names listed promised a sum of 300 *ringgit*. At the end of fieldwork, only 9 individuals and families had fully paid up their pledges.

21. For historical precedents of missionary outreach to Malays, see Sng 1993:134-141.

22. *The Messenger*, Jan-Feb 1965.

23. The SDA operate radio stations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Russia, and television stations in North America. The Adventist World Radio-Asia broadcasts programmes 24 hours a day from Guam in Mandarin, Hokkien, Hakka, Cantonese, English, Tamil, Malayalam, Japanese, Korean and Filipino languages.
24. For an insider study of the *Darul Arqam* movement, see Muhammad Syukri Salleh 1992.
25. For instance, Durkheim asserted that rites are the "rules of conduct which prescribe how a man should comport himself in the presence of [these] sacred objects" (Durkheim 1915: 37f). For him, the worship of divinities are symbolic means by which people worship their own society and mutual social dependency.
26. For other ethnographic contexts, see Ammerman 1991, Bayly 1994, and Caplan 1987.

CONCLUSIONS

Through an extended historical and ethnographic discussion, this thesis has critically examined the ideological categories of "religiosity", "everyday resistance" and "secularisation". It is contended that rather than focusing solely on whether they exist as self-evident or hermetically sealed categories, or in the case of "everyday resistance" whether these acts are "authentic", I have argued that an appreciation of the broader contexts of their formulations would be a more fruitful approach. I have suggested that critical attention should be directed to the manner in which these phenomena are analytically framed as the epistemological positions adopted ironically reproduce the ideological bases that are to be explained. Human actions and cultural meanings are construed in terms of a naturalised oppositional logic that do not necessarily accord with lived experiences.

Throughout the thesis, I have illustrated the overlapping contexts in which to situate the ethnographic evidence for "hegemony" and "everyday resistance" in a locality like Kampung Nehru. In particular, I argue that perceiving a locality as a palimpsest with socially constructed meanings, and of spatialities as politicised are useful analytical tools. Instead of a *tabula rasa* onto which a language of power is inscribed, places are imagined spaces exhibiting a configuration of competing interests. I juxtapose the spatialisation of modernity and the strategic planning of everyday life as engendered by modern capitalism (Lefebvre 1991) with the social construction of space in everyday practices (de Certeau 1984). As new structures of power come into being, new ordering social taxonomies, ideologies, and ritual actions are put into practice. For both the "dominant" and the "subordinate" actors, recasting the fluid landscapes in idioms understandable to them are ubiquitous social practices albeit with different objectives, degrees of clarity and authorising strengths. The boundaries of choice and constraint are differentially drawn.

In postcolonial Malaysia, the dissemination of a nationalist discourse and the practice of "development" is a continuation of a dialogue with the colonial past involving the topics of empire ideologies, religious policies, etiquette, aesthetics and so forth (see Chapter 1). But these ventures are also made culturally complex by the contemporary de-territorialisation of the global landscape as mediated by innovations in information technology, expansion of communication networks, and the flows of capital necessitating the generation of new kinds of social discipline, surveillance, governance, and political

rhetoric. Transnational flows and cultural hybridity add new twists and complications to old hegemonies. Typically, a nationalist discourse is constructed in terms of essentialising cultural oppositions with striking inversions of previous orientalist dichotomies. In constructing a nationalist identity and public culture, an anti-West trope is "good to think with" even as a state-sponsored capitalist realism continues to be constituted by policies aimed towards a social order in which "communalism", religious "sectarianism", and "traditionalism" are to be replaced by a regularised and rationalised milieu.

What is of significance is a policing attention to maintaining accommodative expressions of a postcolonial "religiosity". A public culture of religious ethics without its troubling "millenarian" dimensions is being crafted acting to act as an anchor towards a Malaysian "modernity" devoid of moral chaos. In this nationalist-type discourse, "religion" is considered a precious and scarce cultural resource. Although there might be a pressure towards a Weberian-type "disenchantment" of the world, this process is thus far from being linear, homogenous and dichotomous. As illustrated throughout the thesis, "religion" is not merely what Geertz has famously characterised as a "mirror of reality" nor a fixed "model for" it. Instead, religious ideologies and the religious imagination are reconstituted under changing historical contexts although they are typically depicted and understood as having a timeless quality. The religious domain, in other words, is perhaps better understood as a dynamically structured symbolic matrix where various rules of discourse and structuring interests converge. Or put differently, there are historical moments and spatial locations in which religious discourse and symbols become particularly ideologically potent and emotionally satisfying. At the same time, there is the prospect of heterogeneity as symbolic interpretations are multivocal practices that seldom allow for harmonious consensus. An interpretation is the product of associations, convergences and condensations established through social practice, and not the result of an act of decoding by an observer (Moore 1994:74f). The appearance of finality, completeness and timelessness is a function both of the totalising view of the analyst and of the nature of dominant value systems and discourses. As a fertile symbolic field for interpretation, the public culture of religiosity then becomes a significant component of a repertoire of cultural resources in making sense of a social world in flux.

Viewed as such, rituals are historical practices where there is an ongoing drama to reconfigure competing human agencies. Acts of ritualisation order a fluid world as well as mystify and legitimate social relations. Rituals are also temporal and spatial realms where

extraordinary claims are made, transgressing everyday grievances, vicissitudes and constraints. Based on my limited ethnographic evidence of Kampung Nehru, I have suggested that even if individuals sometimes do not seem to possess a precise knowledge of the details of the dominant discourse or the technology of social control through laws, urban planning, religion and so forth, they are not at all ignorant of its pervasiveness. This resonates with the Gramscian notion of the inchoateness of "common sense" although espousing a broad consent to the "correctness" of the prevailing social and political *habitus* does not necessarily mean that a dissenting consciousness is totally eclipsed either.

In Kampung Nehru, these disparate elements are discernible at various sites and occasions. For most local Hindu residents, a collective consciousness against a perceived cultural inundation and economic disenfranchisement is largely muted but becomes more palpable in both local and nation-wide religious festivals (see Chapter 5). An objectified Hindu culture in these events is convenient for delineating new ethnoscares and social and political linkages. In the celebration of the *thiruvila* (and other public ritual events), I have suggested how this festival does not only allows participants an enjoyable - albeit brief - respite from the clock-time discipline of modernity and everyday routines but it also creates a space for a host of other possibilities. The most significant, in terms of the concerns of this thesis, is the re-inscription of various kinds of boundaries, identities and autonomies. These symbolic spaces act to buttress a sense of "community" vis-à-vis others in the locality, and to make thinly veiled statements about prosperity, status and moral standing. In other contexts, the boundaries of this "community" are more broadly drawn to promote a "public culture" of Hinduism as, for instance, in the nation-wide celebration of Thaipusam. But these boundaries are also not static nor guaranteed. Within Kampung Nehru itself, the efficacy of Mariyamman as a local territorial deity faces challenges from other local deities deemed more relevant and powerful in urban centres as well as from the proselytising efforts of Christian and Islamic groups.

The Seventh-Day Adventists in the *kampung* occupy a similarly paradoxical and marginal position (see Chapter 6). In this case, the cognitive recognition of the world is animated by religious binary oppositions which draw largely from the legacy of American Christian fundamentalist ideologies. This kind of religious ideology has both tactical temporal and spatial demarcations. By espousing doctrinal positions against what is viewed as the grain of secularist and modernist discourse, dominant meanings are displaced, repositioned, and restated in Adventist's terms. Overtly, the futility of political

engagement with the world is underlined but at the same time a selective appropriation of the ethos of modernity is cultivated. Beliefs in "superstitions" are dissuaded, and a rational submission to certain authoritative figures and texts promoted. The SDA's small numbers and sectarian legacy is offset and "misrecognised" (in Bourdieu's terms) by bifurcating the world into "insiders" and "outsiders". Maintaining invisible boundaries and cultural fences that separate them from the "outside" world allows the SDA continued survival as a discrete and legitimate entity. By actively promoting an imagined transnational community with an extensive network of institutions, the devotees minimise their need for establishing conviviality and solidarity in the locality. Arguably, retaining control of its cultural capital and autonomy in this way can also be understood as a kind of "everyday resistance" against a hegemonic time and place even as its adherents are deeply embedded in its modernising influences.

In ritually defined domains, human agents habitually take up secure places within what Bourdieu terms "structured spaces of positions". But social actors also bear multiple, intersecting and sometimes contradictory identities. Outside these arenas, other markers of difference come to the fore. In *Kampung Nehru*, I argue that this is most patently visible in housing structures which function as a homology of a structured differential in status and ethnicised political potency (see Chapter 4). Nevertheless, there exist certain spaces, like the *pasar malam*, which allow de Certeau's notion of "tactics" to be prominent. Dependent on the specific contexts, these sites are places of performance allowing the possibility of ascribed ethnic categories and stereotypes to be negotiated in face-to-face social interactions (see Chapter 3). Thus, whilst a culturally homogenous and unified ethnic face can be presented to the "outside" world during religious festive occasions, there are also individualised symbolic actions that subvert these boundaries as an act of oppositional consciousness and dissent from the dominant norm.

I have also suggested that "the city" is a particularly apt analytical site for examining the ritualisation of ideological practices and discursive contests (see Chapter 2). Because of the processes of creolisation (as characterised by Hannerz), various artefacts and social processes acquire the cultural traits of both globalised homogeneity and local diversity. In particular, the "postcolonial city" is strategically held up as a collective emblem of the amalgam of precolonial traditions and industrialising modernity. To resist a complete assimilation to the hegemonic West, various phenomena are portrayed as metonyms for cultural autonomy. "Squatter colonies" and "squatting" practices in this scheme of things

become particularly problematic as they occupy not only valuable urban land for redevelopment but they also index the glaring gap between the ideals of a robust, confident nation-state awash with economic prosperity and the lot of a significant proportion of the electorate. I have suggested as well that whilst residents of Kampung Nehru are not unaware of these contradictions, they do not nevertheless choose to engage themselves in overt and collective protests. Partly, this is due to their troubled localised history and partly because they have been already promised alternative housing within the same locality. But I would argue as well that not being exposed to alternative social maps that make explicit linkages of the tenuous workings of hegemony constrains any further collective action.

Some of the fieldwork difficulties encountered in Kampung Nehru could be cited in support of the pervasive reality of "everyday resistance". In keeping certain details of their lives and thoughts "hidden" or understated by projecting a veil of guardedness, ignorance and silence, it could be argued that my research subjects were actively resisting the intrusive efforts of an "outsider". Although comparatively muted, unspectacular and collectively uncoordinated they were, nonetheless, effective and commensurate with the perceived "threat". This is in stark contrast to the residents of Kampung Cuabadak Tambahan (see Chapter 4) where the appropriate mix of the pedagogical interventions of NGOs and the specific circumstances of eviction attempts have catalysed robust responses. Despite the overwhelming odds stacked against them, it is an instance, in Scott's terms, where the "hidden transcript" of "everyday resistance" is transmuted into a "public transcript". Nevertheless, it must be recalled that in Kampung Nehru it was largely the dogged determination and entrepreneurship of a single individual that had successfully secured a much desired legally titled piece of land for the *kovil*. Given the specific historical circumstances of the *kampung*, this is not an insignificant triumph for the residents of the settlement.

Contrasting evaluations of the "success" of various kinds of "resistance" to domination partially hinge on the social sensibilities and ideological proclivities of the inquirer. Theoretical formulations of "everyday resistance" are themselves part of a larger analytical quest that seeks to find a satisfactory balance between determinist theoretical perspectives and those that celebrate the historical agency and subjectivity of social actors. Resistance literature, more specifically, places squarely at the centre of analysis relationships of power, and privileges the active agency of the "weak". By rejecting "false consciousness" theories of lower class abstention from collective acts of rebellion, Scott

seeks to rescue subordinate classes from being construed in terms of passivity and ignorance of the workings of power relationships. Leadership from the intelligentsia and organised groups in the forms of oppositional social analysis and populist education (for instance, liberation theologies) is rendered as basically irrelevant as the resistance of the subordinate classes is sited "close to the ground, [and] rooted firmly in the homely but meaningful realities of daily experience" (Scott 1985:348). Whilst both the means and ends of resistance are modest and piecemeal they are, nevertheless, deemed sufficient for the subaltern's purposes.

However, I would argue that the trope of "everyday resistance" - or or that matter, "submerged resistance" or "subversive bricolages" - runs the risks of valorising and mystifying various complex aspects of social relations. Ethnographic details to substantiate these claims can be cast in a romanticised light. The subaltern is idealised and essentialised in the same manner in which the "Orient" was constituted during the colonial era (cf. Said 1978). This mode of textual representation can reflect more the intellectual preoccupations of the inquirer rather than the variegated interests of the ethnographic subject. The equally daily and mundane realities of greed, pride, collusion, self-aggrandisement, displaced hostilities and antagonisms, confusion, co-option, disinformation, personal agendas, and internal factions can be glossed over. Privileging an oppositional logic as an analytical framework also runs the risks of underanalysing wider historical and other cultural processes. For instance, the differences within and between various persons and groups may be too sharply drawn, and the claims of a cohesive identity may be taken for granted. Individuals and societies are reduced to essentialised, autonomous and consensual entities.

Moreover, whilst I would concede that "everyday resistance" is an ubiquitous activity, the catalogue of social actions and practices that fall within the broad umbrella of "resistance" is unsatisfactorily inflated and undifferentiated by Scott. By itself, the transformative impacts of the subaltern's oppositional entrepreneurship is exaggerated. Although symbolic gestures of resistance are an integral component of the working out of the apparatus of power attesting to the pragmatic responses and tactical manoeuvres of people who are marginalised, they are not commensurate with the forces that engender them. A celebratory preoccupation with these kinds of responses can dismiss prematurely the potentialities of more organised and sustained forms of counterhegemonic activities. For the researcher, an equal attention should be given to investigate the weapons of "the powerful", and in examining how their ideologies and discourse are framed and ritualised.

The stability and continuity of institutionalised power relations as mediated through the influences of education, legislation, media, and, in particular, religious ideologies are significant arenas for critical study.

Scott's reading of Gramscian hegemony is also unnecessarily pessimistic, prompting him to identify a more active role for subalterns. His suggestion that "resistance" need not necessarily be always well thought-out and formulated, discursive, coherent, or conscious is a helpful corrective to other analytical excesses. But it could be also argued that Gramsci's hegemony should be conceived as more of a dialectical and organic process that elicits both passive acquiescence and opposition from subaltern individuals and groups. As intimated by Scott as well, the spectre of compliance to a hegemonic discourse is not equivalent to a commitment to it. Although "the lower classes, historically on the defensive, can only achieve self-awareness via a series of negations" (Gramsci 1971:273), for the dominant a monopoly on the apparatus of power is not a foregone conclusion either. It is dependent in part on the efficacy of the current leadership - covering economic, political and moral aspects and attributes - and on the apparent persuasiveness of various ideologies. There is a permanent striving to win and sustain control over the "hearts and minds" of the general populace. Hegemony thus construed is unevenly distributed, not consistently monolithic, and constitutes an incomplete ideological domination. For Gramsci, nonetheless, what is crucial is whether the subalterns are able to recognise the workings of hegemony, and are actively struggling to undermine them.

Or stated differently, the prospect of a total societal control is only possible with the routine consent of subalterns. Whilst powerful coercive resources available to the nation-state apparatus (the police, judiciary, intelligence agencies etc.) have a onerous power in their own right, the "private" institutions of civil society (religion, family, education etc.) are also significant domains of consensual hegemony. A ritualised pattern of habits and outlooks is an integral component of the technology of governance. In this respect, the "naturalness" of religious beliefs and ritual practices has wide appeal. Religious discourse allows for various kinds of entrepreneurship. Amongst others, these idioms do not only lend themselves for the reproduction, legitimation, and reification of power relations, but they also provide powerful imaginative resources for manoeuvring, social critique, and for the crafting of varied versions of utopian truth and human relationships.

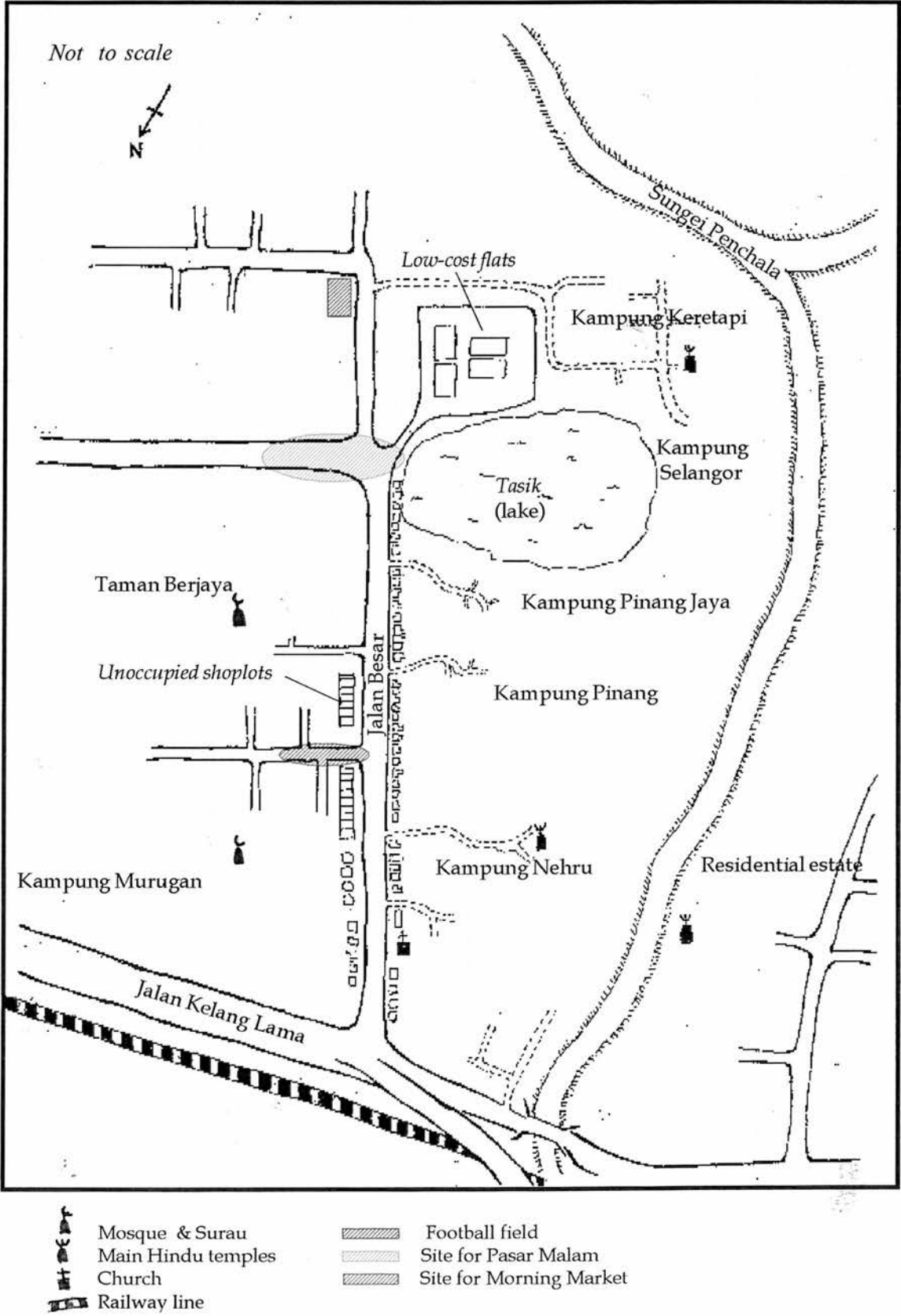
Viewing "religiosity" (and other processes for that matter) in these terms allow

the researcher to track the continuities and dynamics of social change that is otherwise obscured if a "two-tiered" analytical approach is adopted or a disciplinary perspective to social knowledge is eschewed (see Introduction chapter). Religious discourses, like other kinds of ideologies, have a tangible material dimension. They require both temporal and spatial referents just as they seek to transform perceived social realities more in line with their respective utopian models of society. In a similar vein, capitalist ideologies, nationalist discourse, urban planning and so forth are hegemonic practices that require a regularised and rationalised spatial domain in which to legitimate and sustain their respective projects. By paying more analytical attention to how these cultural processes are powerfully framed, and concomitantly, what elements are assimilated, appropriated and contested by subalterns, this thesis has argued for the relevance and significance of a spatialised approach to understanding and unpacking the kinds of ideological landscapes that are differentially constructed.

Map 1: Peninsular Malaysia

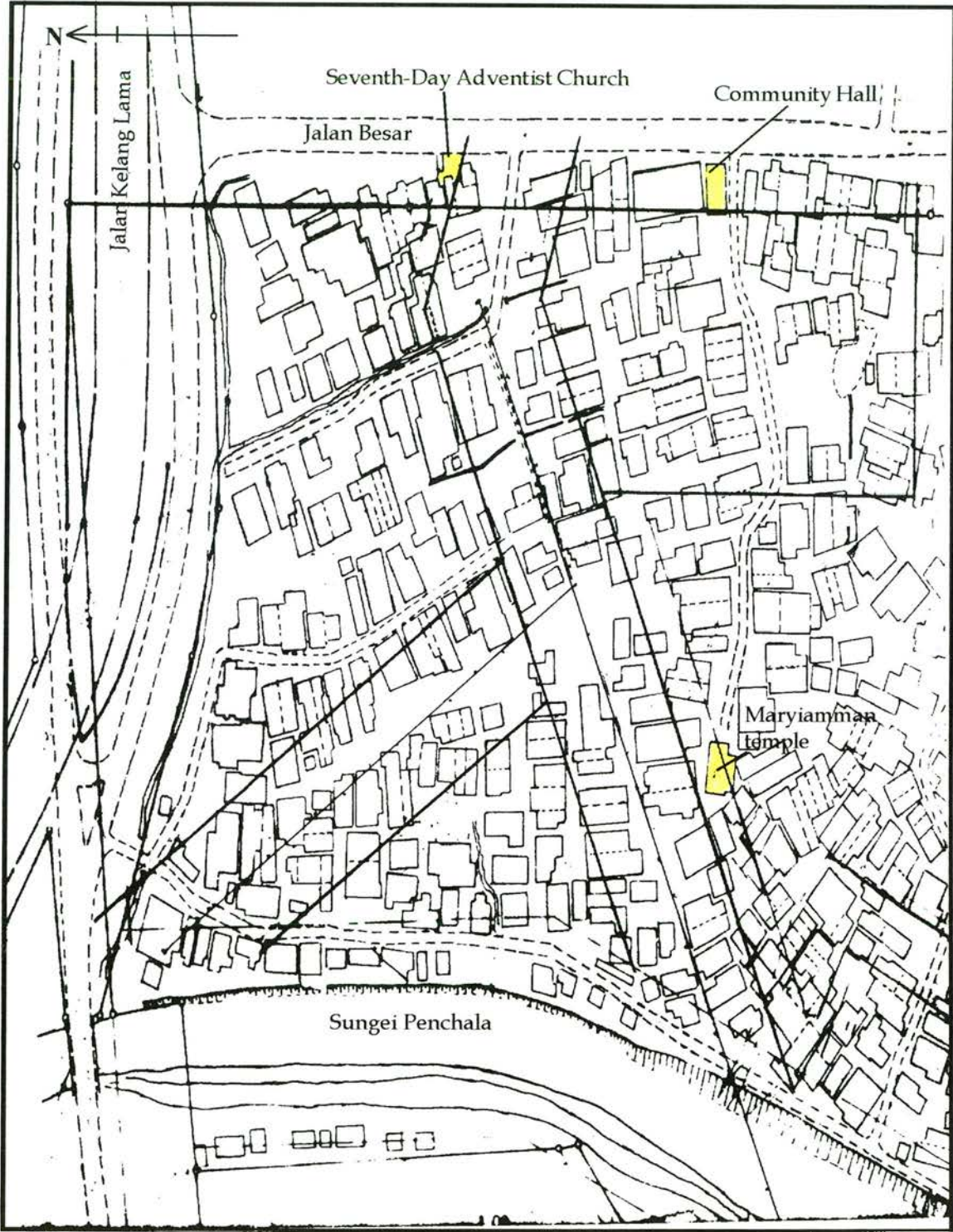


Map 2: Sketch map of Kampung Nehru and locality



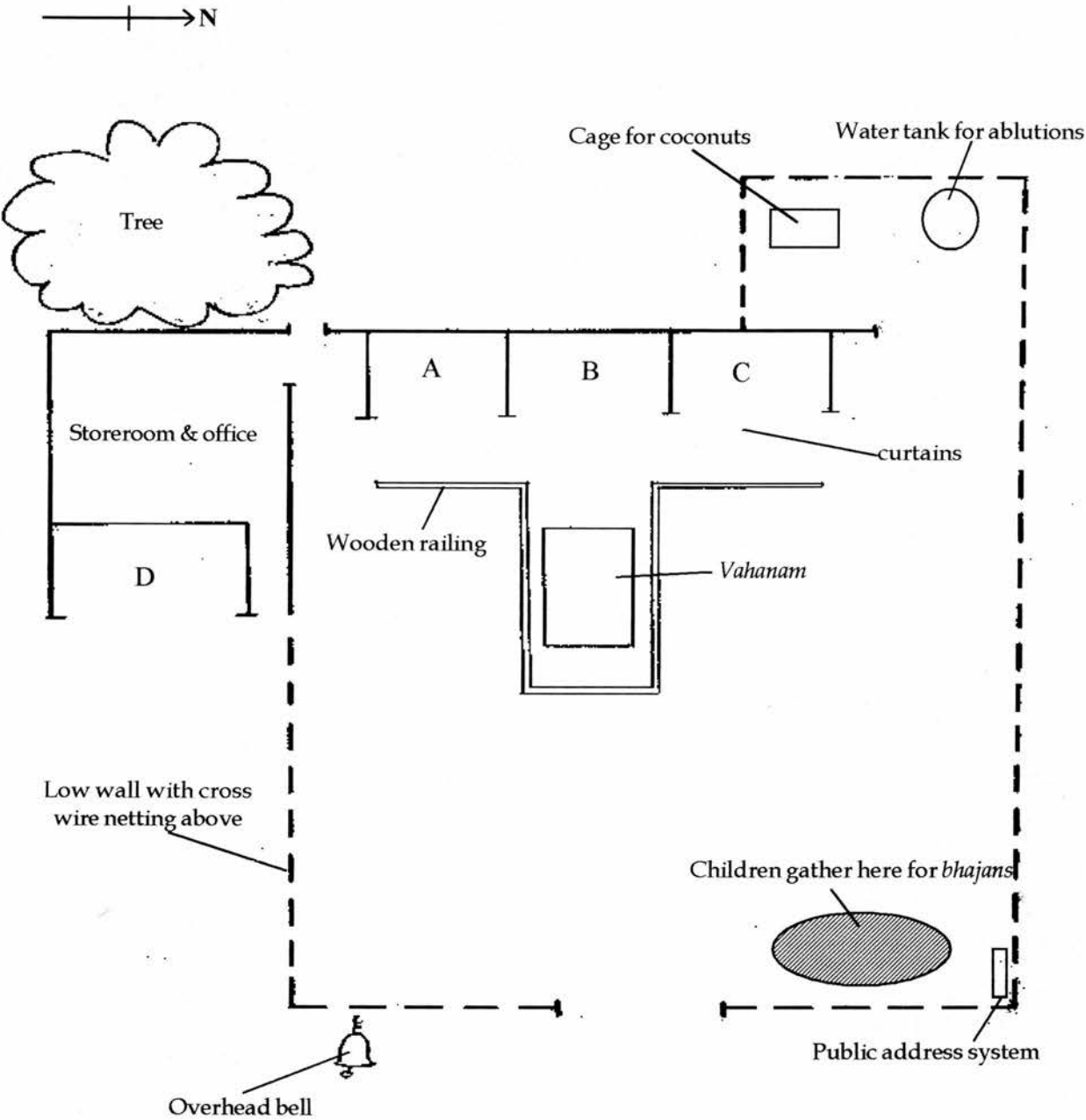
Source: Fieldnotes

Map 3: Layout Plan of a portion of Kampung Nehru and Kampung Pinang



Source: Housing Developer's Layout Plan

Figure 1 - Layout of the Mariyamman *kovil* building
(Not to scale)



Key

- A - Murugan
- B - Mariyamman
- C - Ganesha
- D - Muniswaran

Figure 2 - Layout of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church building
(not to scale)

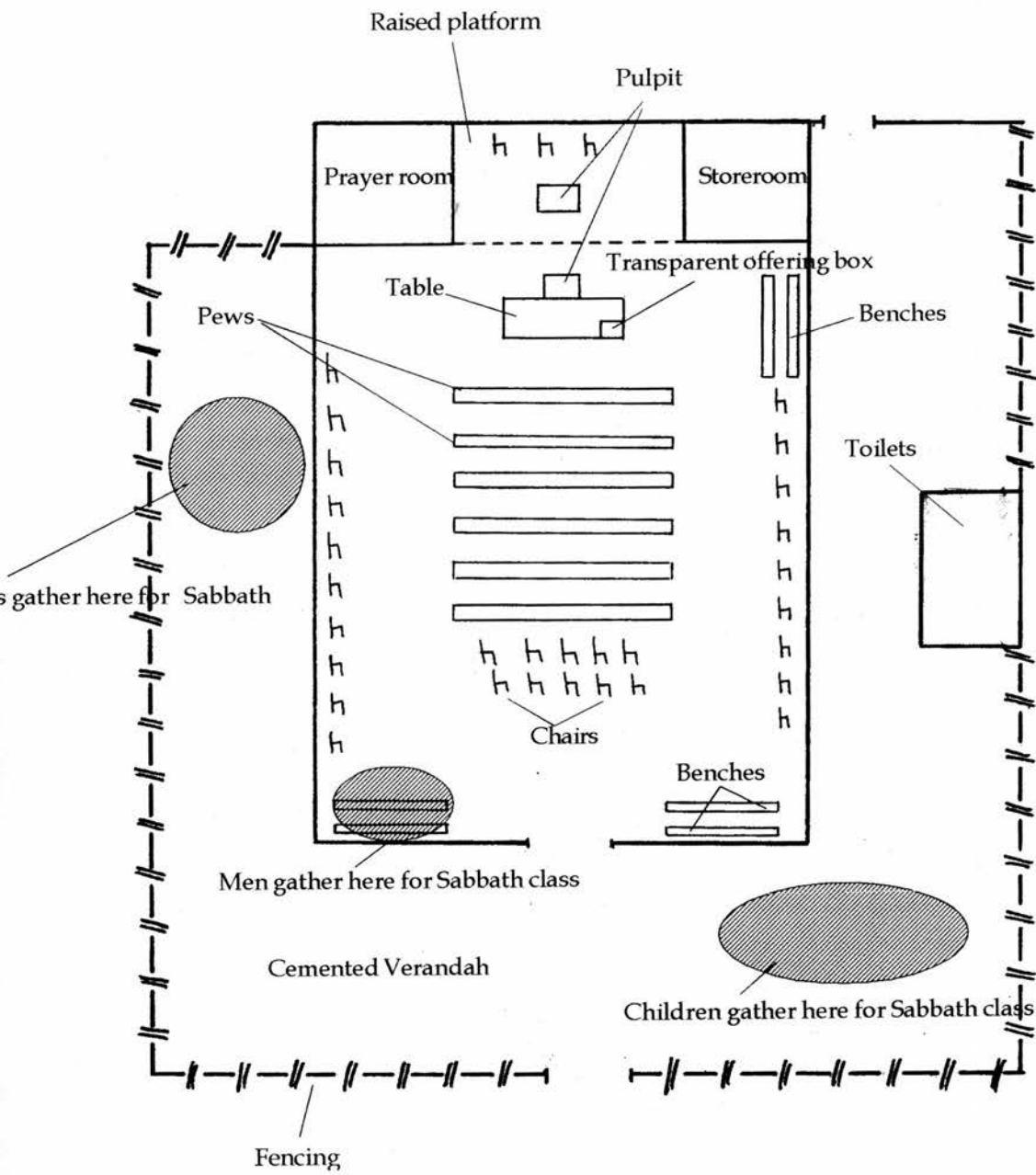




Plate 1 *Living in the sky:* Newly occupied low-cost walk-up flats



Plate 2 *Modern living:* An inside view of the communal areas of the flats

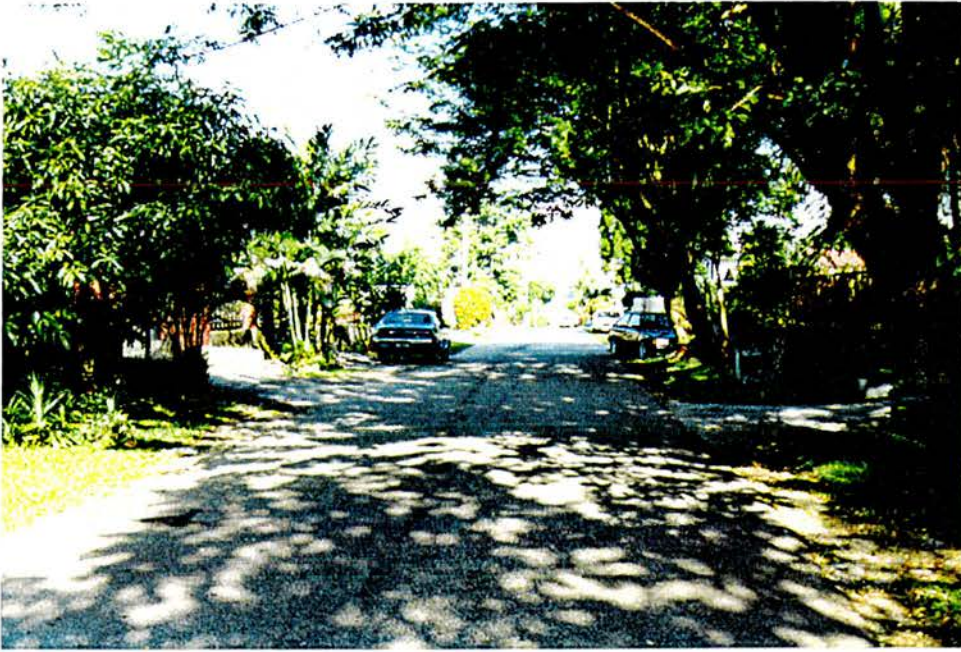


Plate 3 *Green Living*: A typical residential street in suburbia Petaling Jaya, situated about 5 minutes from Kampung Nehru



Plate 4 *Fluid Spaces*: Helmetless motorcyclists and street vending along Jalan Besar during the Islamic month of Ramadan



Plate 5 *Making Way*: A portion of Kampung Nehru demolished nearing the end of fieldwork (April 1995). The footpath leads to the Mariyamman *kovil*



Plate 6 *Adventist Spaces*: The Seventh-Day Adventist church building situated along Jalan Besar



Plate 7 *The Future:* A model representation of the developer's project covering about 160 acres of land presently occupied by 'squatter' settlements



Plate 8 *The Present:* A popular fishing spot in the evenings. Jalan Besar is situated behind the row of wooden shophouses in the background



Plate 9 *Linear Living* : A portion of Kampung Keretapi with rows of barracks-like *rumah panjang* (long houses)



Plate 10 *Sea of Blue*: A typical scene in a Malay *kampung* during the General Election. The banner reads. 'We are united in supporting the National Coalition'.



Plate 11 *The procession* : Kavadi-carriers are encouraged by family members singing *bhajans* as they turn off Jalan Besar into the 'heart' of Kampung Nehru



Plate 12 *Gazing*: Traffic comes to a slowdown along Jalan Besar as onlookers gaze at the *kavadi* procession



Plate 13 *Colour and Heat*: A section of the crowd attending the annual *thiruvila* of the Mariyammankovil. Note the Malay spectators in the background



Plate 14 *Crossing the Fire Pit*: Onlookers cheer and gasp as the first person crosses the pit with a milk *kavadi* on his head.



Plate 15 *The Press Conference:* Malay “squatter” residents conveying their sentiments of development



Plate 16 *Public transcripts:* “Don’t destroy our palace”, “Don’t disturb this *kampung*, this land is our birthplace...”

Appendix 1

PUBLIC HOUSING IN MALAYSIA, 1971-90
(number of units)

Development Programme	Proposed	Actual	Percentage
Second Malaysian Plan (1971-75)			
All public housing	100,000	86,076	86
Low cost housing	44,000	13,244	30
Third Malaysian Plan (1976-80)			
All public housing	220,000	21,500	55
Low cost housing	73,500	26,250	36
Fourth Malaysian Plan (1981-85)			
All public housing	398,570	201,900	51
Low cost housing	176,500	71,300	40
Fifth Malaysian Plan (1986-90)			
All public housing	149,000	97,126	65
Low cost housing	42,880	26,172	61
Total of all public housing	867,570	506,602	58
Total of low cost housing	336,880	136,966	41

Sources:

Mid-Term Review of the Second Malaysian Plan, 1971-1975, Kuala Lumpur: The Government Press, 1973, p 210.

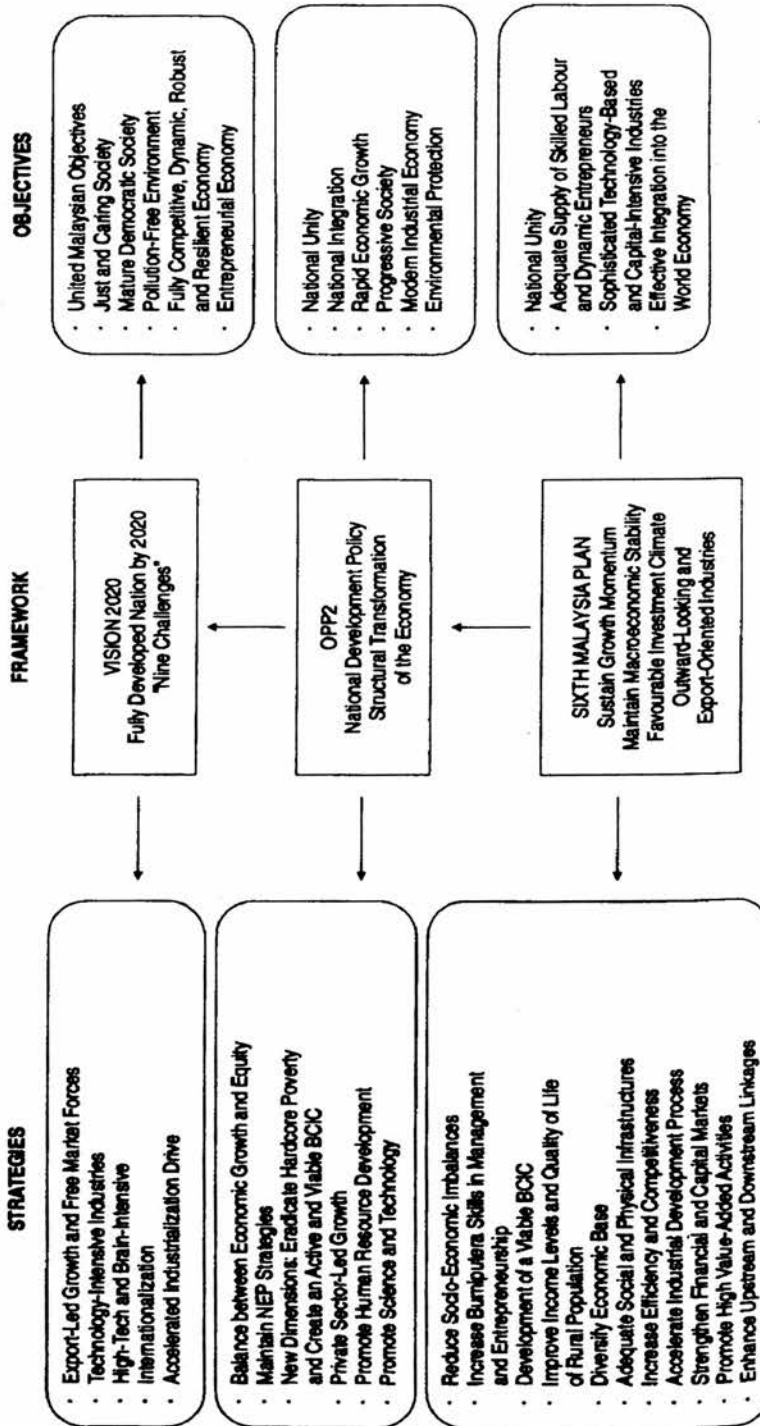
Mid-Term Review of the Third Malaysian Plan, 1976-1980, Kuala Lumpur: The Government Press, 1979, pp 212 & 216.

Mid-Term Review of the Fourth Malaysian Plan, 1981-1985, Kuala Lumpur: The Government Press, 1984, p 431.

Fifth Malaysian Plan, 1986-1990, Kuala Lumpur: The Government Press, 1986, p 530.

Sixth Malaysian Plan, 1991-1995, Kuala Lumpur: The Government Press, 1991, p 365.

Broad Objectives and Strategies for National Development



Excerpts of 'Malaysia: The Way Forward'
speech given by Dr Mahathir Mohamad
Prime Minister of Malaysia
on 21 February, 1991

The purpose of this paper is to present before you some thoughts on the future course of our nation and how we should go about to attain our objective of developing Malaysia into an industrialized country. Also outlined are some measures that should be in place in the shorter term so that the foundations can be laid for the long journey towards that ultimate objective.

Hopefully the Malaysian who is born today and in the years to come will be the last generation of our citizens who will be living in a country that is called "developing". The ultimate objective that we should aim for is a Malaysia that is a fully developed country by the year 2020.

What, you might rightly ask, is "a fully developed country"? Do we want to be like any particular country of the present countries"? Do we want to be like the United Kingdom, like Canada, like Holland, like Sweden, like Finland, like Japan? To be sure, each of the nineteen, out of a world community of more than 160 states, has its strengths. But each also has its fair share of weaknesses. Without being a duplicate of any of them we can still be developed. We should be a developed country in our own mould.

Malaysia should not be developed only in the economic sense. It must be a nation that is fully developed along all the dimensions - economically, politically, socially, spiritually, psychologically and culturally. We must be fully developed in terms of national unity and social cohesion, in terms of our economy, in terms of social justice, political stability, system of government, quality of life, social and spiritual values, national pride and confidence.

Malaysia as a Fully Developed Country: One Definition

By the year 2020, Malaysia can be a united nation, with a confident Malaysian society, infused by strong moral and ethical values, living in a society that is democratic, liberal and tolerant, caring, economically just and equitable, progressive and prosperous, and in full possession of an economy that is competitive, dynamic, robust and resilient.

There can be no fully developed Malaysia until we have finally overcome the nine central strategic challenges that have confronted us from the moment of our birth as an independent nation. The first of these is the challenge of establishing a united Malaysian nation with a sense of common and shared destiny. This must be a nation of peace with itself, territorially and ethnically integrated, living in harmony and full and fair partnership, made up of one Bangsa Malaysia with political loyalty and dedication to the nation.

The second is the challenge of creating a psychologically liberated, secure, and developed Malaysian Society with faith and confidence in itself, justifiably proud of what it is, of what it has accomplished, robust enough to face all manner of adversity. This Malaysian Society must be distinguished by the pursuit of excellence, fully aware of all its potentials, psychologically subservient to none, and respected by the peoples of other nations.

The third challenge we have always faced is that of fostering and developing a mature democratic society, practising a form of mature consensual, community-oriented Malaysian democracy that can be a model for many developing countries.

The fourth is the challenge of establishing a fully moral and ethical society, whose citizens are strong in religious and spiritual values and imbued with the highest of ethical standards.

The fifth challenge that we have always faced is the challenge of establishing a matured, liberal and tolerant society in which Malaysians of all colours and creeds are free to practise and profess their

customs, cultures and religious beliefs and yet feeling that they belong to one nation.

The sixth is the challenge of establishing a scientific and progressive society, a society that is innovative and forward-looking, one that is not only a consumer of technology but also a contributor to the scientific and technological civilization of the future.

The seventh challenge is the challenge of establishing a fully caring society and of caring culture, a social system in which society will come before self, in which the welfare of the people will revolve not around the state or the individual but around a strong and resilient family system.

The eighth is the challenge of ensuring an economically just society. This is a society in which there is a fair and equitable distribution of the wealth of the nation, in which there is full partnership in economic progress. Such a society cannot be in place so long as there is the identification of race with economic function, and the identification of economic backwardness with race.

The ninth challenge is the challenge of establishing a prosperous society, with an economy that is fully competitive, dynamic, robust and resilient....

...Of the two prongs of the NEP (New Economic Policy) no one is against the eradication of absolute poverty - regardless of race, and irrespective of geographical location. All Malaysians, whether they live in the rural or the urban areas, whether they are in the south, north, east or west, must be moved above the line of absolute poverty.

This nation must be able to provide enough food on the table so that not a solitary Malaysian is subject to the travesty of gross under-nourishment. We must provide enough by way of essential shelter, access to health facilities, and all the basic essentials. A developed Malaysia must have a wide and prosperous middle class and must provide full opportunities for those in the bottom third to climb their way out of the pit of relative poverty.

The second prong, that of removing the identification of race with major economic function is also acceptable except that somehow it is thought not possible to achieve this without any shuffling of position. If we want to build an equitable society then we must accept some affirmative action. This will mean that in all the major and important sectors of employment, there should be a good mix of the ethnic groups that make up the Malaysian nation. By legitimate means we must ensure a fair balance with regard to the professions and all the major categories of employment. Certainly we must be interested in quality and merit. But we must ensure the healthy development of a viable and robust Bumiputera commercial and industrial community.

A developed Malaysia should not have a society in which economic backwardness is identified with race. This does not imply individual income equality, a situation in which all Malaysians will have the same income. This is an impossibility because by sheer dint of our own individual effort, our own individual upbringing and our individual preferences, we will all have different economic worth, and will be financially rewarded differently. An equality of individual income as propounded by socialists and communists is not only not possible, it is not desirable and is a formula for disaster....

...We must aspire by the year 2020 to reach a stage where no one can say that a particular ethnic group is inherently economically backward and another is economically inherently advanced. Such a situation is what we must ask for - efficiently, effectively, with fairness and with dedication....

...In order to achieve this economically just society, we must escalate dramatically our programmes for national human resource development. There is a need to ensure the creation of an economically resilient and fully competitive Bumiputera community so as to be at par with the non-Bumiputera community. There is a need for a mental revolution and a cultural transformation. Much of the work of pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps must be done by ourselves. In working for the correction of the economic imbalances, there has to be the fullest emphasis on making the needed advances at speed and with the most productive results - at the lowest economic and society costs...

Appendix 4

UN Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1993

(adopted unanimously on 10 March 1993 in Geneva during the 49th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights)

1. **Affirms** that the practice of forced evictions constitutes a gross violation of human rights, in particular the right to adequate housing;
2. **Urges** Governments to undertake immediate measures, at all levels, aimed at eliminating the practise of forced evictions;
3. **Also** urges Governments to confer legal security of tenure to all persons currently threatened with forced evictions and to adopt all necessary measures giving full protection against forced evictions, based upon effective participation, consultation and negotiation with affected persons or groups;
4. **Recommends** that all Governments provide immediate restitution, compensation and/or appropriate and sufficient alternative accommodation or land, consistent with their wishes or needs, to persons and communities which have been forcibly evicted, following mutually satisfactory negotiations with the affected persons or groups;
5. **Requests** the Secretary-General to transmit the present resolution to Governments, relevant United Nation bodies, including the United Nations Centre on Human Settlements, the specialized agencies, regional and intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations, soliciting their views and comments;
6. **Also** request the Secretary-General to compile an analytical report on the practice of forced evictions, based on an analysis of international law and jurisprudence and information submitted in accordance with previous paragraphs, and to submit his report to the Commission at its 50th session;
7. **Decides** to consider the analytical report at its 50th session, under item 7, entitled "The realization of economic, social and cultural rights" and to determine how most effectively to continue its consideration of the issue of forced evictions.

Source: Extracted from *Suara Peneroka Bandar Julai/Ogos 1993*, p 9.

Seventh-Day Adventist Church History

In just a century and a half the Seventh-day Adventist Church has grown from a handful of individuals, who diligently studied the Bible in search for truth, to a world-wide community of over eight million members and millions of others who regard the Adventist Church their spiritual home. Doctrinally, Seventh-Day Adventists are heirs of the interfaith Millerite movement of the 1840s. Although the name "Seventh-Day Adventist" was chosen in 1860, the denomination was not officially organized until May 21 1863, when the movement included some 125 churches and 3,500 members.

Between 1831 and 1844, William Miller - a Baptist preacher and former army captain in the War of 1812 - launched the "great second advent awakening" which eventually spread throughout most of the Christian world. Based on his study of the prophecy of Daniel 8:14, Miller calculated that Jesus would return to earth on October 22, 1844. When Jesus did not appear, Miller's followers experienced what became to be called "the great Disappointment."

Most of the thousands who had joined the movement, left it, in deep disillusionment. A few, however, went back to their Bibles to find why they had been disappointed. Soon they concluded that the October 22 date had indeed been correct, but that Miller had predicted the wrong event for that day. They became convinced that the Bible prophecy predicted not that Jesus would return to earth in 1844, but that He would begin at that time a special ministry in heaven for His followers. They still looked for Jesus to come soon, however, as do Seventh-Day Adventists yet today.

From this small group who refused to give up after the "Great Disappointment" arose several leaders who built the foundation of what would become the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. Standing out among these leaders were a young couple - James and Ellen White - and a retired sea captain named Joseph Bates.

This small nucleus of "adventists" began to grow - mainly in the New England states of America, where Miller's movement had begun. Ellen White, a mere teenager at the time of the "Great Disappointment", grew into a gifted author, speaker and administrator, who would become and remain the trusted spiritual counselor of the Adventist family for more than seventy years until her death in 1915. Early Adventists came to believe - as have Adventists ever since - that she enjoyed God's special guidance as she wrote her counsels to the growing body of believers.

In 1860, at Battle Creek Michigan, the loosely knit congregations of Adventists chose the name Seventh-Day Adventist and in 1863 formally organized a church body with a membership of 3,500. At first, work was largely confined to North America until 1874 when the Church's first missionary, J.N. Andrews, was sent to Switzerland. Africa was penetrated briefly in 1879 when Dr H.P. Ribton, an early convert in Italy, moved to Egypt and opened a school, but the project ended when riots broke out in the vicinity. The first non-Protestant Christian country entered was Russia, where an Adventist minister went in 1886. On October 20, 1890, the schooner *Pitcairn* was launched in San Francisco and was soon engaged in carrying missionaries to the Pacific Islands. Seventh-Day Adventist workers first entered non-Christian countries in 1894 - Gold Coast (Ghana), West Africa, and Matabeleland, South Africa. The same year saw missionaries entering South America, and in 1896 there were representatives in Japan. The Church now has established work in 209 countries.

The publication and distribution of literature were major factors in the growth of the Advent movement. The *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (now the *Adventist Review*), general church paper, was launched in Paris, Maine, in 1850; the *Youth's Instructor* in Rochester, New York, in 1852; and the *Signs of the Times* in Oakland, California, in 1874. The first denominational publishing house at Battle Creek, Michigan, began in 1855 and was duly incorporated in 1861 under the name of Seventh-Day Adventist Publishing Association.

The Health Reform Institute, later known as the Battle Creek Sanitarium, opened its doors in 1866, and missionary society work was organized on a statewide basis in 1870. The first of the Church's worldwide network of schools was established in 1872, and 1877 saw the formation of statewide Sabbath school associations. In 1903, the deonominal headquarters was moved from Battle Creek, Michigan, to Washington, D.C., and in 1989 to Silver Spring, Maryland, where it continues to form the nerve center of ever-expanding work.

Source: <http://www.cuc.edu/sdaorg/gc/history.html>

A World Church

Seventh-Day Adventists are one of the fastest-growing Christian churches in the world today adding more than one new member by baptism every 50 seconds of every day and organizing five new congregations daily. Membership in the world Church exceeded 8 million in mid-1994 with an average of 1,792 people being added each day a sign of solid growth. From the Church's beginnings in the United States, today, nine out of ten members live elsewhere - in 209 other countries of the world.

Growth in China believers has been phenomenal in a country without a national Church organization. During 1993 one congregation, led by two local elders, held the second largest single baptism in Seventh-Day Adventist history when 4,415 became believers. In 1994, 2,300 were baptized over two days in a province in North China. With the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union, new doors of opportunity for mission and educational work have opened. The first-ever Seventh-Day Adventist church building in Albania was officially dedicated in the city Korce, and two Adventist schools have moved to new locations in the Czech Republic and Romania.

Seventh-Day Adventists are communicating to their different publics using new communications technologies. A new personal and corporate communication era began for the Church when the SDAs On-line forum on CompuServe Information Service opened in July 1994. More than 2,200 members joined the forum by March of 1995, and 300 are now joining each month. Church members can directly communicate with clergy and church leaders, and users can download news about the Church, information files, inspirational materials and statistics. In 1994 Adventist News Network (ANN), and official press agency from world headquarters, was launched; and Adventist Communication Network (ACN) began broadcasting via satellite to 800 churches in North America. ACN produced Net'95, a live five-week series of meetings with evangelist Mark Finley, to more than 60,000 viewers. Adventist World Radio (AWR) continued its expansion in 1994 by adding new languages and transmitters. Today, AWR broadcasts, 1,000 hours per week in 37 languages from 15 transmitters in seven international locations. In 1995, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church entered the world of Internet with a Web page providing information about the Church.

Seventh-Day Adventists have one of the broadest centralized Protestant educational systems in the world (5,530 schools, colleges and universities) and have one of the most comprehensive network of health-care providers (664 hospitals, clinics, medical launches and medivac planes, orphanages, and homes for the elderly). Adventists speak in at least 713 languages and another thousand dialects, leading to the establishment of 56 Church-owned printing plants and editorial offices including the newest in Russian and Bulgaria.

Source: <http://www.adventist.org/facts.html>

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